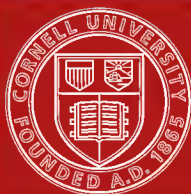




TARAS
BULBA



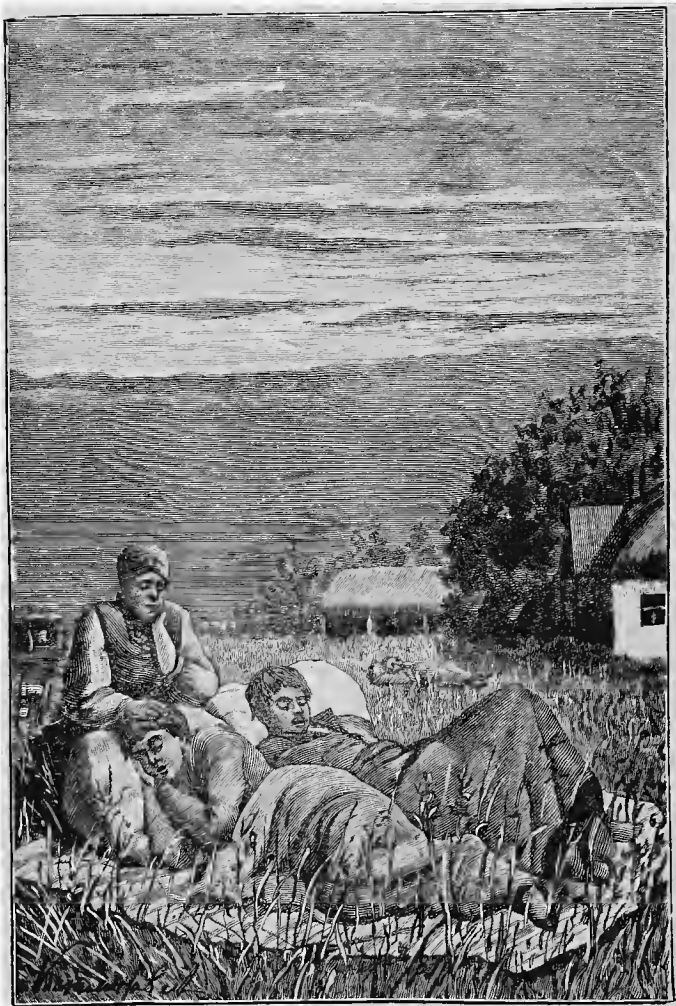
Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://archive.org/details/cu31924026658231>

TARAS BULBA



"THE POOR MOTHER ALONE SLEPT NOT."—P. 21.

TARAS BULBA :
*A Story of the Dnieper Cos-
sacks. By Nicholas Gogol.*
Translated by B. C. Baskerville.



WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.



London and Felling-on-Tyne: THE WALTER
SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LTD. *New*
York: 3 East Fourteenth Street. 1907.

Introduction.

ENGLISH people hear and read so much about Russia nowadays that it seems almost presumption to preface *Taras Bulba* with anything approaching an explanation of the word "Cossack." Indeed, I have only ventured to do so because I know there are some who, though they have heard all about those nomadic men among whom old Taras was, and is, a hero, like to have a few historical facts relating to that remarkable people set before them. It is for such that the following introduction has been written.

Cossack is the English for "kozak," and kozak means a knight or warrior. Every Cossack deserves the name, for he is never

Introduction

happy unless fighting, and lives up to the traditions of his race by crowning the victory with plenty of plunder. They are of Slavonic origin; and though their language is more like Russian than any other, there are many Polish words in it—a fact that is not to be wondered at when we remember how many times they ravaged and sacked the “fair land of Poland.” Their creed is now, as in the time of Sietch, that of the Eastern Church. To day their position cramps their energies; but in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Pole, Turk and Tartar had good reason to fear them. At that time they were divided into two parts, one inhabiting the lower reaches of the Don and Volga, the other the South of Poland and the Ukraine (Little Russia). A glance at the map will show that while the former was Europe’s rampart against the Tartar,

Introduction

the latter served the same purpose against the Mussulman. But the Cossacks of Ukraine, brave and savage as they were, had as much as they could do to save themselves from utter destruction at the hands of the Turks. So heavy were their losses in the perpetual struggles against them, that at last, at the end of the fifteenth century, they began to search for an ally. They had not far to look, for to the north and west of the Ukraine, stretching from the Carpathians to the Baltic, lay a prosperous republic, long since mutilated out of all recognition, but then boasting a large territory and a civilized people. It was to the Polish Republic that the Cossacks of the Ukraine appealed, offering military service in return for protection.

At first all went well: the Cossacks were free to elect their own hetmen, and to lead

Introduction

their own lives, till their new protectors summoned them to arms. Until that summons came they passed their time in occasional raids by land or sea against the Turk, filling their pockets with sequins, and giving their youth something to do. But this harmony did not last long: the Cossacks made a treaty with the Sultan, thereby curbing their energies south of the Black Sea; and what was worse, the Poles tried to deprive them of their civil rights and turn them from the Eastern Church to the Western. Then it was that the men of the Ukraine found leaders like Taras Bulba, and swept in fierce, plundering hordes even to Krakow and the foot of the Carpathians. The struggle dragged on with varying success down to the year 1654, when Russia settled the question of rights and liberties by putting the Cossacks under

Introduction

her own rule. A long series of revolts and insurrections followed: Russia not only won in the end, but has now succeeded in making the Cossacks her most powerful means of defence.

These hordes, utterly untouched by European civilization, form a separate military force, known as the Cossack Army, and consisting of the Cossacks of the Don, the Cossacks of the Black Sea, the Cossacks of Astrakhan, of the Caucasus, of Orenburg, the Cossacks of the Ural, of Baikal, of Meetcherak (Baskirs), and the Cossacks of Azov. Thanks to the sturdy horses they rear on their steppes, and the rough nomadic life they lead from earliest infancy, they are the best light cavalry in the Russian army. A democratic, republican people, they acknowledge no superiors, except their military officers, whom they elect themselves as

Introduction

in the days of Sietch and Taras Bulba. Their chief, or hetman, however, is nominated by the Tsar, and the heir-apparent to the Russian throne is always entitled the "Hetman-General of the Cossacks."

In *Taras Bulba* Gogol has given us a Cossack epic. Those savage, pillaging hordes, with their comradeship and fanaticism, their bravery and rough justice, have found a Homer of the steppes to sing their fame; for Gogol, himself a Little-Russian, loved the steppes as they did, and as all the poetry and longing of a Cossack is in that verdant ocean, he has told of them and their lives in words that charm the Anglo-Saxon as well as the Slav, and appeal to all who love a brave deed or a faithful friend.



TARAS BULBA.

CHAPTER I.

AND so thou'rt home, sonnie! But ye look queer indeed! What may that pope's¹ cassock be that ye've got on ye? And do all the Academy walk dressed like that?"

¹ Pope = a priest of the Eastern Church.

Taras Bulba

With such words did old Bulba greet his sons, bursars of the Kiev Academy, when they came home. They had just dismounted from their horses. They were big fellows; both of them looked sheepish, as young men let loose from the Academy are wont to do, and their strong, sturdy faces were covered with a virgin down that had never known the razor. The paternal welcome confused them greatly, and they stood quite still, their eyes fixed on the ground.

“Stand ‘up, stand up, that I may look right well at ye,” the father went on, turning them about. “Such coats ye’ve on! Such long coats! Never yet were there such coats in the world! Just run a little, one of ye. I would fain see if they fall not on the ground and sweep the field.”

“Don’t laugh, father, don’t laugh!” cried the elder son at last.

“Ho, ho! Look ye what dignity! And why don’t laugh?”



“‘WELL THEN, LET IT BE WITH FISTS,’ SAID BULBA.”

Taras Bulba

“Yea, I mean it. I’ll fight ye, by God I will; though thou’rt my own father, I’ll fight ye if ye mock at me like that.”

“Aha! aha! thou’rt such a son! So! Thine own father,” exclaimed Bulba, stepping back in astonishment.

“Yea, mine own father. I brook no man’s insult, and let no man’s affront go by.”

“And how wilt thou fight? With thy fists maybe?”

“With aught thou wilt.”

“Well then, let it be with fists,” said Bulba, baring his arms. “We’ll see what ye can do with fists.”

And by way of greeting after their long separation, father and son began to exchange blows in the chest, middle and sides. Each paused occasionally to look at his adversary, and then resumed his pommelling.

“Look ye, look ye, good people! The

Taras Bulba

old man's mad! Clean out of his mind," cried the boys' good mother, who stood pale and thin in the doorway, and who had not been able to kiss her long-absent darlings. "The children have but come home, we've not sêen them for a year or more, and he must needs be up to God knows what. Fighting indeed!"

"Yea, he fights lustily," observed Bulba, pausing. "Right well, by God! He'll make a good Cossack. Well, sonnie, welcome to ye! Let's embrace." Father and son fell to kissing one another. "Do ye but drub everybody as ye've drubbed me. Let no man mock 'at ye! But how funny all thy clothes look! What does that rope dangle there for? And thou, young Beibas, why stand there with thy hands at thy sides? Come now, thou hound's son, art going to fight me too?"

"Bless him! he must needs think of that now," broke in the mother, who had

Taras Bulba

been embracing her younger son. "Who'd think of fighting his own begotten children, as if they'd nought better to do now! The child's come ever so far; he's young, and been toiling and tramping [the child was over twenty years old and a good six feet high], and when he ought to be resting and eating a bite, he must needs make them fight!"

"Ay, ay, thou'rt a milksop, I trow," Bulba was saying. "Don't mind the mother, sonnie; she's but an old woman, she knows nothing. What pampering want ye? Your pampering must be the open field; yea, a good horse, that's your pampering! See ye that sword?—that's your mother. That's all trash they rammed into your heads, and the Academy and all those books, and primers and philosophy and the devil only knows what—I spit on it all!" Here Bulba used a word that is not generally put into print. "There's

Taras Bulba

something better than all that. This very week I'll send you both to Sietch. There's the school for ye! there's the only place to get understanding!"

"And only to stay a week at home?" asked the thin old mother, with tears in her eyes. "And not let them run about, and not let them know their own nest, and not even let me look at them?"

"Have done with thy whining, have done, old hag! A Cossack's not for danging after women. Thou wouldst be hiding them under thy petticoat and sitting on them like a sitting-hen on her eggs. Away with ye! away! Yea, put all thou hast upon the board. We want no cakes, nor gingers, nor poppy-pasties or other fangles; drag us a whole sheep or a goat, yea, hundred-year-old honey, yea, plenty of brandy; not faked with raisins and rubbish, but clear, sparkling brandy that can pinch and prickle like mad."

Taras Bulba

Bulba bade his sons follow him into the little guest-chamber, whence two pretty serving-wenches, who had been arranging the room, ran out. They pretended to be afraid of the young masters, not liking men to look at them; anxious, in short, to maintain feminine customs—scream and fly at the sight of a young man, and cover their faces for shame. The room they entered was furnished in the taste of those times, those days which remain now but in songs, and in the people's thoughts; in the taste of those times that even the blind minstrels, with their three-stringed guitar, have ceased to sing of to the listening crowds; in the taste of those stern, turbulent times when the struggles and battles for the Greek Church were being played in the Ukraine.

The furniture was clean and painted with coloured clay. The walls were hung with swords, knouts, bird and fish nets, fire-arms, horns cunningly arranged for holding

Taras Bulba

powder, a golden bit, and fetters with silver fastenings. The windows were small, and fitted with those dull, round-cut panes—only to be met with now in old-world monasteries—which it is impossible to see through. There were shelves in the corners, filled with ewers, bottles, and flasks of green and blue glass, engraved silver goblets, gilded cups of all manner of workmanship—Venetian, Turkish, and Circassian, which had found their way to Bulba's farm by many hands, as was the custom in those days. The birchwood forms round the room, the large table under the sacred pictures in the altar-corner, the wide stove built with many an ingle and projection, and faced with variegated tiles—all these things were familiar enough to the two youngsters, who spent their annual holidays at home. They always used to walk, because ^{of} bursars were not supposed to ride in those days. They had but their long

Taras Bulba

forelocks, which any armed Cossack was welcomed to pull. Bulba had sent them a pair of young horses from his own drove just before they left the Academy.

Bulba ordered all the centurions and officers who happened to be at home to be summoned in honour of his sons' home-coming, and when two of them came with Captain Dmitro Tookatch, his old comrade, he introduced his boys to them, saying, "Look ye, what youngsters! I'll send them to Sietch very soon." The guests congratulated both Bulba and his sons, telling the latter there was good work in store for them, and no better school for a youngster than Sietch-beyond-the-Rapids.

"Now, brother-gentlemen, sit ye all down, where ye will, by the table. Come-to, my lads, first of all we'll drink some brandy," said Bulba. "God bless ye, lads, and ye. Ostap and Andrew; God give ye luck in war, that ye may beat the Mussulmans, and

Taras Bulba

beat the Turks, and beat the Tartars—yea, and when the Poles begin aught against our faith, that ye may beat the Poles too. Hold out your cup! It's right good brandy, what? And how's the Latin for brandy? Well, well, lads, the Latins were fools; they knew not if there was brandy or not in the world. What did they call him who wrote the Latin verses? I'm not very strong in learning, and so I'm not sure: Horace, was't not?"

"Look ye, what a cunning old father it is," thought Ostap, the elder son. "He knoweth all the classics, the dog, and still he must needs sham."

"The archimandrite did not let ye so much as smell brandy, I trow," Taras ran on; "but confess now, did they not lash ye lustily with birches and fresh cherry-sticks, about the back, yea, and about all a Cossack hath? And maybe, as ye waxed all too clever, they ripped ye with the lash as well?"

Taras Bulba

They doled it out not only on Saturdays maybe, but on Wednesdays and Thursdays as well?"

"It booteth not to think on what is past, father," coolly answered the elder son. "What hath been is done with."

"Let them try now," said Andrew; "let any man provoke me, let a Tartar show himself: he'll know what manner of thing a Cossack sword is."

"Well said, sonnie, by God, well said! Yea, when it cometh to that I too will go with ye! By God, I'll go with ye. What manner of a devil keeps me here? That I may become a reaper of buckwheat, a housewife, a minder of sheep, yea, and of swine, yea, to dangle after the wife? The plague take her! I'm a Cossack, I will not! And what if there be no war? I'll go with ye beyond the rapids for all that—and see the world again. I'll go, by God, I will!" And old Bulba went on working himself into

Taras Bulba

a passion, sprang up from the table, looked dignified and stamped his feet on the ground. "We will away in the morning. Why tarry here? What enemy awaiteth us here? What do we want with this hut? What do we want with it all? What are all these pots for?" And he began to knock down the mugs and flasks, and hurl them about the room.

The poor old wife, long since accustomed to her husband's ways, sat on the bench and sadly watched him. She was afraid to say a word, but could not restrain her tears when she heard the fatal decision. As she gazed at the children she was doomed so soon to part with, nobody could have described all the dumb strength of bitterness that was in her eyes and compressed lips.

Bulba was terribly dogged. His was one of those natures that could only exist during the boisterous fifteenth century and in that

Taras Bulba

semi-nomadic corner of Europe, when the whole southern portion of primitive Russia, neglected by its princes, was left prey to, and ravaged from end to end by hordes of untamable Mongolians. Thus men who were bereft of house and hearth made a firm stand, settling on the ashes of their burned homes in the very eyes of their threatening foes, amidst perpetual dangers grew used to looking them straight in the face, and forgot to know that there was such a thing as peril. A warlike flame had kindled in the once peace-loving Slavonic heart, begetting Cossackism, that nomadic trait in the Russian character. Every river country and ferry, every strand and inhabitable spot was sown with Cossacks, whose very sum no man knew, and whose bold comrades truly answered the Sultan who asked their numbers: "Who knoweth them? They are spread o'er every steppe; where a hillock is, there will ye find a Cossack."

Taras Bulba

Truly this was a marvellous effort of Russian strength, and the miseries of war had begotten it. Instead of the old holdings and small towns, crowded with hunter and hound, instead of the petty princes' rivalry, menacing settlements, Cossack-huts and enclosures, bound together by common danger and common hatred of the heathen spoilers, sprung up everywhere. It is now a matter of history that their perpetual struggles and restless lives saved Europe from those savage hordes that at one time threatened to swamp it. The Kings of Poland, who succeeded the petty princes as masters, weak and distant though they were, well understood the Cossacks' value, with the advantages obtained by those warlike, vigilant lives, and encouraged and flattered them. Under their remote authority, hetmen, chosen from amongst the Cossacks themselves, soon transformed the huts and settlements into regiments and regular

Taras Bulba

districts. This was no standing army, and no one would ever have remarked it; but in time of war or tumult, within eight days, all mustered, horsed and fully equipped, drawing but a ducat's pay and swelling in two weeks' time to such an army as no amount of recruiting could have brought together. When the campaign was over, the warrior returned to his meadows and pastures by the Dnieper fords—went a fishing, bought and sold, brewed beer, and was, in short, an independent Cossack. Foreigners of the time were astonished at their aptitude, and not without reason. There was no craft the Cossack did not know; he could make wine, build a cart, grind powder, do a farrier's or a gunsmith's work, and last but not least, riot and drink and feast as only a Russian can; it all came natural to him. Besides these enrolled Cossacks, bound to appear in time of war, scores of volunteers could always

Taras Bulba

be had in time of urgent need. A captain had but to enter the squares and market-places of the settlements and villages, and standing up in a cart cry out—

“Hark ye! ye beer swillers and brewers. Enough of this ale-brewing, yea, and wallowing on stoves, yea, feeding the flies with your greasy bodies; come-to and win knightly fame and honour! And ye ploughmen and mowers, sheep-minders and women lovers, enough of following the plough; yea, shoving your greasy boots in the earth, yea, dangling after women and wasting knightly strength!”

And these words were ever as sparks falling on dry wood. The ploughman broke his plough, the brewers and beer-vendors left their vats and smashed their barrels, the craftsman and trader sent their craft and shop to the devil, broke all the pots in the house, and sprang into the saddle. The Russian character had taken a wide,

Taras Bulba

strong oscillation, and gained a powerful front.

Bulba was one of the original colonels, born for fighting and turbulence, and known for his rough, straightforward nature. Polish influences were already at work among the Russians; many had adopted their neighbours' customs and introduced luxuries, such as servants, hawks, huntsmen, banquets, and large houses. But Taras did not approve of all these things; he loved the simple Cossack life, and quarrelled with those of his comrades who adopted Warsaw customs, calling them the Polish noble's slaves. Ever turbulent, he counted himself a lawful defender of Orthodoxy; he would march into any settlement where the inhabitants complained of newly-levied taxes, or of the lease-holders, and taking the law into his own hands, would sit in judgment on them, aided by his own men. He deemed it his duty ever to draw swords in three cases—

Taras Bulba

when the commissaries failed to respect their elders and stood before them with covered heads; when any man sneered at Orthodoxy or the memory of his forefathers; and lastly, when he found himself face to face with Turk or Mussulman, against whom he judged it justifiable to take up arms to the glory of Christianity under all circumstances. And now he rejoiced at the thought of taking his boys to Sietch, with a "Look ye, what lads I've brought ye!" to his old battle-worn comrades, and of watching over their early lessons in war and carousal, which latter he counted one of the first knightly qualities. He had intended to send them alone, but the sight of their fresh, well-grown, strong beauty aroused the old fighting spirit in him, and he was determined to start with them on the morrow, though the need of haste existed only in his own stubborn imagination. He lost no time, but began to give orders at once, choosing

Taras Bulba

horses and equipments for his sons, going over stable and storehouse, and picking out the servants who were to start with them. He deputed his authority to Captain Tookatch, together with strict orders to appear in every part of the regiment should a message come from Sietch. Though he was still tipsy and his head full of drink, nothing, down to orders to water the horses and feed them with the best, large-grained wheat, was forgotten. This done, he rejoined his sons, tired out.

“Now, my children, it's time to sleep, and to-morrow we'll do what God putteth to our hands. Nay, make us no beds; we need no beds, we will sleep outside.”

Night had barely covered the sky, but Bulba always went to bed early. He lay down on a rug and covered himself with a sheepskin cloak, for the nights were fresh and he liked to sleep warm when at home. It was not long before he began to snore ;

Taras Bulba

all those in the courtyard followed his example, and grunts and snorts were to be heard on all sides. The first to fall asleep was the watchman, for he had drunk more than anybody in honour of the young masters' home-coming.

The poor mother alone slept not; she bent over her sons' heads as they lay side by side, she combed their tangled locks and moistened them with her tears. She gazed at them with all her soul, gazed at them with all her senses turned into sight, and yet she could not gaze her fill. She had fed them with her own breast, had reared and fondled them, and now she might not have them with her. "My sons, my sweet lads, what will become of ye? What awaiteth ye?" she cried, and the tears lodged in the wrinkles that had changed her once fair face. Verily, her lot was a bad one, as was every woman's in those distant times. She had been loved but for an instant, in the first

Taras Bulba

heat of youth and passion ; then her stern charmer had cast her aside for his sword, his comrades, and his carousals. She would see him for three days in two years, and then probably not even hear of him for years again. Ay, and when she did, and they lived together, what a life was hers ! She suffered insults and even blows whilst she dreamed of caresses, bestowed in the fulness of love. Hers was a strange existence amid the crowd of wifeless knights on whom dissolute Sietch had thrown its stern mantle. Her joyless youth faded before her ; her fair, fresh cheeks and bosom lost their bloom for lack of tenderness, and became covered with premature wrinkles. All love, all sentiment, all that is tender and passionate in woman was turned into maternal instinct. She hovered over her children like some solitary lapwing of the steppes, full of pain and passion and tears. Her sons, her sweet sons, they are taking

Taras Bulba

them away from her, that she might never see them more : who can say ? Maybe the Tartar will slash off their heads in their first battle, and she will not even know where their forsaken bodies, the prey of every passing vulture, lie. She would give the last drop of her blood to save one of theirs. Sobbing, she gazed on their eyes, sealed by heavy sleep, and thought, "Maybe Bulba will tarry a day or two. He thought to start so soon because he drank too much."

The moon had long since lightened the crowded court, the clump of willows, and the high grass that buried the hedge ; but she still sat on at her dear sons' heads, neither did she raise her eyes from their faces, nor think of sleep. The horses, feeling dawn's approach, ceased eating and stretched themselves on the grass ; the topmost willow leaves began to rustle, and little by little the rustling wave spread to the lowest branch. Not a whit weary, and

Taras Bulba

only wishing the night might last, the mother sat on . . . a colt's shrill neigh came from the steppes ; red bands appeared across the sky. . . .

Suddenly Bulba woke and sprang to his feet. He remembered the events of the night before quite well.

“Now, my lads,” he cried. “Enough sleep, enough, enough! Water the horses! Where's the old wench!” (So he always spoke of his wife.) “Hark ye, old one! hasten to get us something to eat! The road lieth long before us.”

The poor old woman, thus bereft of her only hope, wearily dragged herself into the cottage. As she tearfully prepared the morning meal, Bulba gave final directions, making no end of a stir in the stables, and choosing the best clothes for his sons' wear.

The bursars were suddenly transformed. Instead of their muddy shoes, they wore red

Taras Bulba

morocco boots with silver heels; their trousers, wide as the Black Sea, and with a thousand pleats and folds, were confined at the waist by a gold cord, from which hung little straps, tassels, and pockets for pipes. Their casaques were of the best red cloth, and fastened with ornamented belts, from which chased Turkish pistols were suspended; swords hung at their sides. Their faces, scarcely flushed as yet, seemed paler and handsomer than the day before, whilst their black moustaches gave a somewhat deeper shade to their young, sturdy bloom. They looked very handsome in their black astrachan gold-topped caps, and their mother could not say a word when she saw them. She stood looking at them, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Come now, my sons, there’s nought to tarry for, all’s ready,” said Bulba, at last. “And now we must needs all sit down before we start, as is the Christian custom.”

Taras Bulba

All sat down, not excepting the yokels who had been standing respectfully in the doorway.

“And thou, mother, must give the children thy blessing,” he went on. “Pray God they may fight lustily, defending knightly honour and the Christian faith, and if not—better they should perish, and their breath not hamper the earth. And do ye go to your mother, children; a mother’s prayers can save by land and sea.”

Their mother embraced them with maternal weakness, and threw two small images round their necks.

“May the Mother of God preserve ye. . . . Forget not your mother . . . my sonnies. Send me a little word now and then. . . .”

She could say no more.

“Well, now we must away, my children,” said Bulba.

The horses stood saddled at the door. Bulba sprang on his Devil, who shook with

Taras Bulba

rage when he felt a staggering pounds'-weight on his back, for Bulba was stout and remarkably heavy.

When the mother saw her children had mounted, she flung herself on the younger one, whose face seemed the more softened, grasped his stirrup, clung to the saddle and, her eyes full of despair, refused to let him go.

It took two big Cossacks to carry her into the cottage. When they had ridden away, in spite of her advanced years, she ran out lightly as a wild she-goat, stopped the horse with abnormal strength, and embraced her son with mad, uncontrollable passion. They dragged her away again.

It was a grey morning, but some glare seemed to be upon the verdure, some discord in the birds' song. The boys looked behind them as they rode. The farm had disappeared into the ground, and two chimneys were all they could see of the modest cottage.

Taras Bulba

There were the tops of the trees which, squirrel-like, they had so often climbed; still stretched before them lay the meadow whereon all their life-history, from the time they used to roll in its luxuriant grass to the days they hunted the black-bearded Cossack, was written. And now nought remains but the pole over the well, with the cart-wheel fastened at the top, outlined against the sky; already the valley they have ridden over is beyond the hill which has hidden everything. Farewell—childhood—and play, and all, and all!



CHAPTER II.

ALL three rode in silence. Old Bulba was thinking of the past. His whole youth, those fleeting years that any Cossack mourns over, wishing his life were all such, passed before him. He wondered how many old comrades he would find in Sietch, and reckoned up those he knew were dead and those he hoped were still living. The silent tears gathered in his eyes, and his grizzled head was bowed.

Taras Bulba

His sons were busy with other thoughts. But I must tell you more about those lads. At twelve years of age they were both sent to the Academy in Kiev, as every self-respecting dignitary thought it his duty to give his sons a classical education, though the times were such that they very soon forgot it. They were like all boys who entered the Academy—young savages who had been brought up in the freedom of the steppes. During their stay at school, however, they acquired a certain amount of polish, and learned enough to make them alike in some respects. Ostap, the elder, began his career by running away during the first year. They brought him back, thrashed him unmercifully, and put him to his primer. Four times he buried the book, four times he was brutally flogged and provided with a new one. He would no doubt have buried the fifth too, but his father promised to keep him in the monastery, and swore he should

Taras Bulba

never see Sietch unless he passed every class in the school. It was a strange thing that these threats were uttered by the same Bulba who denounced scholarship and advised his son to shun it, as we have just seen. Ostap applied himself to his book, and soon kept pace with the best scholars.

But the teaching was terribly at variance with the way of living, and all its scholastic, grammatical, rhetorical, and philosophical subtleties neither agreed with the times nor changed with them, and were of no use in after-life. Those who mastered them never knew how to apply their knowledge, no matter how little pedantic it was, and the most learned were the most at fault by reason of their inexperience. The republican organization of the school, the mass of young, full-grown, healthy boys produced actions that were very much at variance with an academic life.

Taras Bulba

Sometimes bad discipline, sometimes hunger's repeated demands, sometimes the many needs that assert themselves in healthy, robust youth—all these causes joined together bred a spirit of enterprise that afterwards developed in Sietch, and the hungry bursars would raid the town in a way that gave the citizens good cause for vigilance. The market-women always hid their cakes and pies as an eagless does her young when they saw an approaching bursar, and the very prefect, whose duty it was to watch the schoolfellows under his charge, had such amazing trouser-pockets that he could stow the contents of any gaping bazaar-woman's stall therein. And so the bursars lived apart, and "Society," which consisted of Russian and Polish nobility, would have nothing to do with them. The governor himself, notwithstanding the Academy's repeated support, never took any notice of them, except to

Taras Bulba

give orders that they were to be kept as strictly as possible.

For the rest, the education was more than liberal, as neither the rector nor the monk-professors spared rod or whip, and the lictors, under their orders, would flog the monitors with a vigour that made the latter's trousers to itch them for many a long day. This was no hardship to some, who thought it little worse than good strong brandy with a dash of pepper in it; but others soon wearied of these endless cataplasms, and ran away to Sietch—that is, if they managed to find the road and were not caught before they got there. Ostap's application to his books did not save him from the inexorable rod, and no doubt it all hardened his character, and developed those powers of endurance that always distinguished the Cossacks. He was the best of comrades. Though he rarely led adventures, such as raiding a garden or

Taras Bulba

orchard, he was ever the first to join an enterprising bursar's standard, and never informed against a comrade; no amount of flogging would make him do it. He sternly frowned at any form of dissipation except fighting and forbidden feasts, and probably never thought of any. Straightforward with his comrades, he possessed kindness in the only form it could exist in such a nature and in such times. His poor mother's tears had sincerely moved him, and it was the only thing that made him sadly hang his head.

His younger brother Andrew's senses were somewhat livelier and better developed. He learned more readily and with less effort than the other's strong, heavy nature demanded. He was more inventive too; led many a daring enterprise, and, thanks to his ready wit, managed to escape punishment when his brother stoically threw off his coat and lay on the floor without

Taras Bulba

thinking of asking for mercy. Andrew, too, burned with the lust of conquest; but his heart was capable of other feelings as well. When he reached his eighteenth year, a strong longing for love asserted itself, and woman began to play a part in his feverish dreams. As he listened to philosophical discourses he would see her, fresh, black-eyed and tender. Her shimmering, elastic bosom, her bare arms, soft and white, were ever before him, whilst the very dress that clung round her girlish, robust limbs breathed some vague sensuality into his dreams. He carefully kept these wonders of his passionate young heart from his companions, for in those days it was a shame and dishonour for a Cossack to think of love or woman before being tried in a battle.

The last few years he was at school he led few expeditions, but spent his spare time wandering about the narrow streets of

Taras Bulba

Kiev, where the low-roofed houses peeped enticingly into the street from the midst of cherry orchards. Sometimes he would venture into the aristocratic quarter, which is now Old Kiev, where the Little-Russian and Polish nobility lived, and the houses were built with a certain amount of taste.

One day as he wandered about this part he was nearly run over by a nobleman's coach, and the long whiskered driver promptly laid his whip on him. Andrew, red with passion, caught one of the back wheels and stopped the coach, whereat the driver, afraid the boy would settle accounts with him, whipped up the horses, that broke into a gallop, and the bursar, who managed to take his hands off the wheels just in time, fell face downwards in the mire. He heard a clear, musical laugh; looking up, he saw a beautiful girl, with black eyes and a skin as white as snow brightened by the morning sun, standing at the coach window. She

Taras Bulba

was laughing heartily, and her merriment added a sparkling charm to her dazzling beauty.

Andrew stood staring at her with a kind of frightened surprise. Then he tried to rub the mud from his face, which only made matters worse. Who was the beautiful girl? He asked a group of well-dressed servants who were standing in a gateway listening to a young minstrel, but they only laughed at his muddy face and did not answer his question. He found out at last that she was the daughter of the Voevoda¹ (governor) of Kovno, who had lately come to stay in the town.

The next night, with an audacity peculiar to bursars, he scaled the garden wall, climbed a tree whose branches reached the roof, and sliding down a stove pipe, found himself in a bedroom where the lovely

¹ Governor of a town or province and military commander.

Taras Bulba

Polish girl was taking the costly earrings from her ears. At first she was too frightened to speak, but when she saw that the bursar stood with downcast eyes, too timid to move a finger, and recognized the boy she had seen fall into the mud, she began to laugh again.

There was nothing alarming about a good-looking lad like Andrew, so she laughed with all her heart, and played with him too. Like most Poles, she was very volatile, but her wonderful, dazzling eyes darted a flame that looked like constancy itself. The bursar was spellbound, and made no resistance when she boldly approached him, put her sparkling diamonds on his head, hung her earrings on his lips, and draped some filmly, gold-embroidered muslin thing about him. She dressed him up and played a thousand pranks with him, all with the childish freedom that characterizes Polish women. This only increased the bursar's

Taras Bulba

confusion, and he made a laughable figure as he stood staring open-mouthed into her shining eyes. Then they heard a loud knocking at the gates, and she made him crawl under the bed till the alarm was over, when she called her waiting woman, a Tartar slave, and told her to take him into the garden and thence to the street. But Andrew was not so fortunate this time, for he woke the watch, who not only drubbed him himself, but called the serving-men, who beat him far down the street till his long legs put an effectual distance between himself and his pursuers. As the governor had a large number of retainers, Andrew found it very dangerous to pass the house after that night. Once he saw her in church, when she smiled at him as if he were an old friend. He had only another glimpse of her before the Voevoda left the town, then, instead of the fair Polish girl, he saw somebody's puffy face looking out of the window.

Taras Bulba

This is what Andrew was pondering over, with head bent low and eyes fixed on his horse's mane.

The steppe had long since folded them in her verdant arms, and only their black caps rose above the ears of the high grass that surrounded them.

"Eh! eh! what have ye that ye sit so silent?" cried Bulba, waking at last from his reflections. "Ye are as mum as monks. A plague on all thoughts, I say! Put the pipes in your mouths; we will smoke a little, yea, and spur our steeds and go faster than any bird."

And bending to their horses the Cossacks galloped over the steppe. Now even their caps are hidden, and only a line of trampled grass marks their flight.

The sun had long since come out in the once dull sky, and was bathing the steppe in its cheerful light. All that was sad and pensive fled from the Cossacks' souls,



“EH! EH! WHAT HAVE YE THAT YE SIT SO SILENT?”

Taras Bulba

and their hearts, like birds, shook their wings. The farther the steppe reached the more beautiful it became. Then the whole of the south as far as the Black Sea, all that territory which is now called Little-Russia, was one green wilderness, whose countless waves were untouched by plough and trampled on by the horses alone, which hid there in droves as in a forest. Nature has nothing fairer than these steppes, with their surface like a green-gold ocean strewn with a million flowers. Posies, lilac, blue and white shimmered in the tall, slim grass; yellow gorse and white clover danced upon the surface. An ear of corn, brought God knows whence, had taken root, and partridges pecked here and there among its thin stalks. The songs of a thousand birds filled the air, and hawks suspended therein with outstretched wings, gazed on the earth below them. A flock of wild geese wheeling cloudwards sent their

Taras Bulba

piercing cry from some distant lake. A lapwing rose with measured stroke from the grass and bathed delightfully in the air's blue waves, now lost in the heights till one black spot alone was visible, now turning on the wing and soaring sunwards. The devil take you, steppes, how fair ye are!

The travellers made but a short halt for dinner, when the Cossacks who formed their escort dismounted and produced a small, flat barrel filled with brandy, and gourds that served as cups. They ate a little bread and salt, or a dry cornflower biscuit, drank just enough to refresh them—Bulba never allowed topping on the road—and resumed their journey until the evening. Then the whole steppe was changed. Her many-hued surface, seizing the sun's last bright rays, darkened bit by bit, and the shadow crept over it until it was all dark green. Evaporation thickened, every flower and every blade of grass gave up

Taras Bulba

its fragrance till all the steppe steamed sweetness. Wide gold-rose bands, as if painted by some gigantic brush, stretched across the sky, which was crossed ever and anon by groups of bright transparent cloudlets; the fresh breeze, alluring as the sea waves, gently rustled the grass and lightly fanned the cheeks.

The music that had filled the day was hushed and gave place to another, for the speckled ousels left their holes, and perching on their hind paws, whistled over the steppe; the grasshopper's crackle grew louder, and from time to time a swan's cry arose from some lonely lake and rang in the night air like silver. . . . The Cossacks halted in the midst of a field, chose their bivouac, kindled a fire, and cooked their evening meal, the steam rising slantwise into the air. After supper they turned their hobbled horses on to the grass, and wrapping themselves in their cloaks, lay down to sleep.

Taras Bulba

Only the night stars watched them. They heard the countless insects that filled the grass and their crackling, whistling, and croaking, sharpened by the clear air, lulled their dozing ears. If one of them awoke and started up from sleep the whole steppe lay before him, glinting with the firefly's bright sparkle. Ever and anon the night sky was lighted by the distant glare of dry rushes burning on the meads and river banks, and dark flights of swans, hastening northwards, shimmered with a pinkish hue till it seemed as though red kerchiefs were flapping against the sky. . . .

The travellers continued their uneventful journey. They did not pass a single tree; all was one endless steppe, free and beautiful. Sometimes they saw the shadowy tops of some far-off forest bordering the Dnieper's banks.

And once Taras showed his sons a small distant spot in the grass, saying—

Taras Bulba

“Look ye, lads, yonder a Tartar jumps.”

A small whiskered face with glinting eyes sniffed the air like a hunted dog, but hid with stag-like swiftness when he saw the Cossacks were thirteen men.

“Hark, ye children, try and catch the Tartar! But nay, ye’d never get him, for his horse is swifter than my Devil.”

But Bulba took precautions nevertheless, for he feared an ambuscade. So they galloped to a small stream that flows into the Dnieper, and swam a long way to hide their trail; then they returned to the shore and resumed their journey.

Three days later they were near their destination; the air suddenly cooled, and they knew the Dnieper was nigh. First it glistened and lay like a broad ribbon on the horizon, then rolled on in cool waves, stretching wider and wider, till at last it covered half the land. They reached that part where the Dnieper, hitherto

Taras Bulba

hemmed in by rapids, takes its own at last, and flowing at its will, roars loud as the sea itself, whilst the islands cast in its midst force it yet farther from its banks till its waves, free of rock and crag, overflow the land. The Cossacks sprang from their horses, boarded a ferry-boat, and after three hours' sail reached the island of Hortitsy, where Sietch, that was ever-changing its site, then lay. A crowd of people were on the shore squabbling with ferry-men. The Cossacks remounted, Bulba tightened his belt, twisted his long moustachios, and assumed an air of dignity. His sons, too, looked themselves over with a mixture of anxiety and vague pleasure, as they all made for the suburb that lay half a verst from Sietch. There they were welcomed by the clang of fifty sledge-hammers in five-and-twenty smithies, dug out in the ground and roofed with cornel. Sturdy tanners sat under their open sheds

Taras Bulba

and kneaded hides with their sinewy hands; smiths sat by stalls piled with flints, steels and powder; Armenians hung out rich kerchiefs, the Tartar turned mutton pasties on a spit, and a Jew drew brandy from a barrel.

But the first man they met was a Cossack, who lay fast asleep in the middle of the road, his arms and legs stretched far apart. Taras could not help pausing to admire him.

“Ho! ho!” he cried, pulling up. “He hath had his fill indeed! Ho! ho! a famous sight truly!”

And the picture was bold enough. The Cossack lay, stretched lion-like, full length across the road; his hair, thrown proudly back, lay half a yard behind him, and his wide trousers of costly red cloth were smeared with tar, as a mark of the wearer's contempt. Bulba stood admiring him for some minutes, and then the little party continued their way down the narrow

Taras Bulba

street, thronged with the busy craftsmen of all climes and nations who thronged the suburb that was like a fair, and clothed and fed Sietch, for she only knew how to make merry and use arms. They left the suburb behind them at last, and saw a few scattered Cossack huts, roofed with cornel, or after the Tartar fashion, with felt. Cannon stood here and there, but no houses or pent-sheds built on short posts, as in the suburb, could be seen. A small rampart and stockade, totally unguarded, showed a terribly exposed position.

A few long-limbed Cossacks who were lying, pipe in mouth, in the middle of the road, glanced coolly at the little party but did not stir. Taras and his sons carefully picked their way among them, saying—

“Good day to ye, gentlemen!”

“And good day to ye,” the loungers answered. The field was sprinkled far and wide with picturesque groups of idlers.

Taras Bulba

Their swarthy faces bore the scars of many a battle and traces of every kind of hardship. Such is Sietch! Such the lair that breeds proud, brave lions, the determination and Cossackism that overflows the Ukraine!

The travellers rode into the large square, used for councils. A Cossack sat on a big overturned barrel; he had taken off his shirt, and was busy mending it. The next thing they came across was a band of minstrels, in whose midst a young Cossack was dancing. His cap was all awry and he waved his hands in all directions, yelling—“Quicker! quicker! Grudge not an orthodox Christian his brandy, Thomas!” And Thomas, who had a black eye, recklessly meted out a large mugful of brandy to each of the bystanders. Close by this young dancer were four old ones, who tripped about nimbly enough, for they jumped like the wind nearly on to the musicians' heads, then suddenly bending

Taras Bulba

down, danced in a squatting position, their silver heels pinging on the hard ground till it rang again, whilst the air resounded with the dance as they beat time with them.

But one, nimbler than all these, rushed with a yell amongst them, his long hair streaming in the wind, his strong chest bared. He was dressed in a sheepskin pelisse, and the sweat ran from him like water out of a bucket.

“Cast thy pelisse, man!” cried Taras, at last.

“I can’t,” panted the dancer.

“Why not?” asked Taras.

“It’s my way. Where I cast it there I drop.”

His cap had left his head long ago, his waist-belt was gone, and so was his kerchief—all had fallen where they pleased. The crowd grew; others joined the dance, and it was astonishing to see how the step

Taras Bulba

changed from slow to quick and quick to mad, how it took every possible form that inventiveness has given the Cossack dance.

“Eh! eh! If it weren't the horse I'd go myself, my God I'd go myself!” cried old Taras.

Meanwhile, grey heads, respected and honoured in Sietch, had appeared in the crowd; Taras saw a lot of well-known faces, Ostap and Andrew heard greeting from all sides such as—“Eh, so thou'rt here, Petcheritsa!” “Good day, Kozolup!” “Whence hath God sent thee, Bulba?” “Thou'st come thus, Doloto!” “Good morning, Kirdiagal! Good morning, Gusti! Thought I to see thee, Remen?” And the knight errants, gathered from all nomadic Russia, exchanged kisses. Then began the questions—“And how's Kassian?” “What of Baradavka?” “What of Koloper?” “What of Pidshisok?” and

Taras Bulba

all the answers Teras heard were that Baradavka was hanged in Tolopan, that Koloper was flayed alive near Kizikipmenon, that Pidshisok's head was salted in a barrel and sent to Tsargrad.¹ Old Bulba grew grave, and he said thoughtfully—
“They were good Cossacks indeed.”

¹ Tsargrad=Constantinople.

CHAPTER III.



TARAS BULBA and his sons had been about a week in Sietch. Ostap and Andrew troubled themselves very little about their military training. Sietch did not like to hamper herself with tactics and waste her time thereon; she preferred to educate

her youth by experience alone, in the very dust of war, of which there was always enough for the purpose. The Cossacks found it tiresome to occupy their intervals

Taras Bulba

of peace with anything in the way of discipline, except target-shooting, and occasional hunts and races on the steppes and meadows. The rest of their time was spent in loafing, which showed how varied were their heart's desires. The atmosphere of Sietch was altogether unusual, being one of perpetual feasts and joys that began noisily and seemed to lose their end. A few men worked at some craft or other, or kept stalls and traded, but the greater part made merry from morning till night, as long as a coin stayed in their pockets, or their loot kept out of the stalls and pot-houses.

There was something bewitching about this endless revelry. It was no gathering of revellers who got drunk from sheer spleen, but a wild, careless merry-making. Every man who came into the town promptly forgot and cast behind him all that had interested him hitherto. One may say that he spat on his past, and

Taras Bulba

light-heartedly gave his heart and comradeship to those who, merry as himself, owned neither home, parents, nor children, nought beyond the free heavens, and feasting to his heart's content. This led to a mad revelry that could never have existed under other conditions. The tales and gossip that spread through the groups of idlers who strewed the ground were often so humorous and so well told, that it took all a Cossack's coolness to listen to them without twitching a muscle of his face or turning a hair—a rare trait that distinguishes the Southern Russian from his brothers to this day. Drunken, noisy revelry it was, but there were no dark pothouses where a man passes his time in gloomy mirth. It was a group of schoolboys, who, instead of listening to the master's lectures and precepts, undertook campaigns with five thousand cavalry; who, instead of a field to play ball in, had dangerous unprotected

Taras Bulba

frontiers, where the Tartar showed his cunning head, and the green-turbaned Turk looked long and sternly. The difference was, that instead of a strong authority keeping them in school, they had run from home and parents of their own free will. There were those who, the rope already hanging round their necks, instead of grim death, had sought life amongst all this revelry. There were those who could not keep a copeck in their pockets, and those who, hitherto counting a ducat riches, could, thanks to the Jews, turn their pockets inside out without fear of anything falling to the ground. There were all those bursars who had grown tired of the academic rod and had not brought a single book from school; here, too, were those who knew what Horace and Cicero and the Roman Empire meant. There were officers who distinguished themselves later on in royal armies; there were partisans who, ripe in

Taras Bulba

experience, held the noble opinion that it mattered not where they fought so long as they got some fighting, as it was impossible for a man of honour to live without it. And there were many who came to Sietch just to say they had been there and were already knights tried in warfare. But who was not here? That strange republic was needed in those days. Those who loved a warlike life, or golden goblets, or rich brocades, or ducats and reis, could always find work here. Women lovers alone had nothing to do, for not a single woman dared to as much as show herself even in the outskirts of Sietch.

What surprised Ostap and Andrew more than anything were the endless streams of men who settled down in Sietch without anybody asking them what their names were, or whence they came. All a new-comer had to do was to go up to the head ataman (commander), who said—

Taras Bulba

“Good day! Well, dost thou believe in Christ?”

“I do,” answered the new-comer.

“And dost thou believe in the Holy Trinity?”

“I believe.”

“And dost thou go to church?”

“I do.”

“Then cross thyself.”

The new-comer crossed himself.

“H'm! very good,” answered the head ataman. “Join whatever division thou wilt.”

This ended the ceremony. All Sietch prayed in one church, which she was ready to defend with her last drop of blood, though she would not hear of fasting or temperance. Only Jews, Turks and Armenians, attracted by the large profits, ventured to settle in the suburb, for the citizens never liked trading, and always paid just what they happened to take out of their pockets.

Taras Bulba

But these covetous traders, like the people who live under Vesuvius, had but a sorry life, for when a Cossack had spent all his money he went to the stalls and took what he wanted without paying for it. Sietch consisted of sixty divisions, like independent republics, or rather like a children's school or bursary, living in readiness for any emergency. Nobody made or kept any provisions; the divisional ataman, who was consequently called *batka* (father), had everything, including funds, clothes, puddings, barley and other food, even fuel, under his charge. Money, too, was given to him to take care of. Quarrels between different divisions were not rare, and always developed into a free fight. The square would fill with the two parties, who broke each other's ribs until one side got the upper hand, when all the merrymaking began. Such was Sietch, that had so many attractions for young men.

Taras Bulba

Ostap and Andrew threw themselves into this riotous sea with all the enthusiasm of youth; and promptly forgetting home, school and all that had hereto possessed their hearts, they gave themselves up to this new life. Everything interested them, from the riotous ways to the simple justice, and to the laws that seemed too strict for such an independent republic. If a Cossack stole the smallest trifle, he was considered a dishonour to all Cossackdom, and tied ignobly to a conspicuous post with a club beside him, which every passer-by was bound to beat him with as long as he remained alive. Those who would not pay their debts were chained to a cannon till a comrade bought him out with the sum he owed. But nothing impressed Andrew so much as the way they punished murder. They used to dig a deep hole, put the murderer in it, then, lowering a coffin containing the victim's corpse on to him, cover up living and

Taras Bulba

dead together. This punishment and the man buried alive with the horrible coffin haunted Andrew for many days.

Both boys were soon on very good terms with the Cossacks. They often joined their comrades, and sometimes other divisions, in hunting the deer and wild goats, and shooting the countless birds that inhabited the steppes. They would go, too, to the lakes, rivers and streams allotted to their division, and by casting nets and setting snares land a haul big enough to furnish supper for the whole company. And though there was nothing in all this to put a Cossack to the test, they were very soon remarked as being both lucky and apt in all they undertook. They were, besides, bold and sure marksmen, and could swim the Dnieper against the current—two things that never failed to get a young man a warm welcome in Cossackdom.

But old Bulba was preparing other work

Taras Bulba

for them, and at once. Long he wondered how he could persuade Sietch to undertake some serious expedition, where knightly work was to be had. At last he sought out the head ataman; and going straight to the point, said—

“Now, commander, it’s high time we men of Sietch were stirring.”

“Nowhere to go,” answered the ataman, taking his pipe from his lips and spitting on the ground.

“How ‘nowhere’? We can go into Turkey or Tartary.”

“We can’t, neither to Turkey nor Tartary,” coolly replied the ataman, replacing his pipe.

“What do you mean by ‘can’t’?”

“Yes—we’ve promised the Sultan peace.”

“But he’s only a Mussulman, forsooth, and God and Holy Writ command us to fight Mussulmans.”

“We’ve no right to. If they insulted

Taras Bulba

our religion, we might perhaps; but now we can't."

"Why can't we? What d'ye mean by saying we can't? we've no right? I've two sons here, both young. Neither of them has been to the wars, and here you stand and say we've no right and we've no need to go out."

"Well, but it is not seemly now."

"So! methinks 'tis now seemly for Cossack strength to lie idle, for a man to die like a dog without any good work, that neither his country nor all Christianity may be any the better for him. If so, what are we alive for, what the devil are we alive for? Explain me that. Thou art a 'cute man; they did not make thee commander for nought. Explain to me what we are alive for."

The commander did not explain, for he was an obstinate Cossack. After a pause he said—

Taras Bulba

“All the same, there is no war to be got.”

“’Tis no use even of thinking about it?”

“’Tis no use even of thinking about it.”

“Wait, ye skinflint devil, ye’ll see what I’m made of,” thought Bulba, and forthwith meditated revenge.

Talking with this comrade and that, he gave them all plenty of liquor, and it was not long before a good few drunken Cossacks made for the square, where the kettledrums used for summoning councils were fastened to a post. There being no sticks, as the drummer always kept them in his pockets, they caught up a piece of wood and began to beat the drums with it. The first roll brought the drummer, a tall man with only one eye, and very sleepy into the bargain.

“Who dared to beat the drums?” he cried.

“Be quiet; take your sticks and beat

Taras Bulba

when you are told," answered his tipsy seniors.

The drummer, who knew only too well how such incidents ended, promptly took the sticks from his pockets and beat the drums. The first and second summons brought such a crowd of Cossacks that their black caps bobbed like bees in the square, and the third brought the seniors, the commander with his stick of office, the judge with his military seal, the scrivener with his inkhorn, and the captain with his mace. They all doffed their caps and bowed low to the crowd, who stood stiff and proud, their arms akimbo.

"What meaneth this gathering? What want ye, gentlemen?" began the commander, but cries and abuse drowned his words.

"Put down the staff, put down the staff at once, ye devil's son! We don't want you any more," cried the Cossacks.

Taras Bulba

A few of the sober ones seemed inclined to oppose this; but all, drunk or sober, meant business, and cries and yells became general.

The commander would have spoken, but knowing the excited, independent crowd was capable of beating him to death for it—as invariably happened on similar occasions—he bowed very low, laid down the mace, and hid himself as well as he could in the crowd.

“And do ye order us, too, to lay down our emblems?” asked the judge, scrivener, and captain, prepared to lay down seal, inkhorn and mace.

“No; ye can stay!” roared the crowd. “We only had to turn out the commander, because he’s an old woman, and we want a man in command.”

“And whom choose you as commander now?” asked the seniors.

“Kukubenka!” cried some.

Taras Bulba

“We won’t have Kukubenka!” cried others. “He’s too young; the milk hath not yet dried on his lips.”

“Shilo shall be ataman!” roared another party. “Put Shilo in command!”

“To the devil with Shilo!” cried the crowd, with anger. “What manner of Cossack is he, when he pilfers, the hound, like a Tartar? Send the drunkard in a sack to the devil! Borodati, Borodati! we’ll put Borodati in command!”

“We won’t have Borodati. Send him back to his filthy mother!”

“Shout for Kirdiaga,” Bulba whispered to those near him.

“Kirdiaga, Kirdiaga!” yelled the crowd. “Borodati, Borodati! Kirdiaga, Kirdiaga! Shilo! To the devil with Shilo! Kirdiaga!”

The candidates left the crowd as soon as they heard their names shouted, lest any one should think they had personally aided their own election.

Taras Bulba

“Kirdiaga, Kirdiaga!” sounded louder than ever. “Borodati!”

They began to settle the question by blows, and Kirdiaga triumphed.

“Go and bring Kirdiaga.”

A good ten men left the crowd. They had succeeded so well in their efforts to get drunk that they could scarcely stand on their legs, and made for Kirdiaga’s hut to tell him of his election.

Kirdiaga, though somewhat old, was a cunning Cossack. He had been sitting in his hut quite a long time, and seemed to know nothing of what was going on.

“Well, gentlemen, what do you want?” he asked.

“Come along, thou’rt made commander!”

“Mercy on us, gentlemen!” exclaimed Kirdiaga, “I am not worthy of such an honour. How can I command? Yea, my understanding is not enough for such duties. Is no better man to be found in all the army?”

Taras Bulba

“Come with us, when they call thee,” cried the Cossacks.

Two of them grasped his arms, and though his feet did not touch the ground, he was finally dragged on to the square, followed by abuse, kicks, blows and exhortations.

“Don’t hang back, devil’s son that thou art. Take the honour, thou dog, when it’s given thee!”

Thus was Kirdiaga received by the crowd.

“What, gentlemen, are you all agreed to have this Cossack for your commander?” ran through the crowd when Kirdiaga appeared.

“All agreed!” came the answer, and the ground shook long from the roar.

One of the elders took the mace and gave it to the newly elected ataman. Kirdiaga refused it, as custom demanded. The elder offered it to him a second time; a second time it was refused, Kirdiaga only accepting

Taras Bulba

it the third time. The crowd cheered till the earth shook with the Cossacks' roar. Then four seniors stepped forward, grizzled Cossacks all of them—there were no very old men in Sietch, as none of the citizens ever died a natural death—and each picked up a handful of earth that the recent rains had turned into mud, and placed it on the new ataman's head. The wet earth dripped down on to his face and moustache, but Kir-diaga stood without flinching, and thanked the Cossacks for the honour they had done him.

With this the noisy election was over, and it is doubtful if the result pleased any one so well as it did old Bulba, for he had had his revenge, and Kir-diaga was an old comrade who had shared perils by land and sea, such as make up the roughness and difficulties of a soldier's life. The crowd forthwith began to celebrate the election with such a merrymaking as Ostap and



“THE WET EARTH DRIPPED ON HIS FACE AND MOUSTACHE.”

Taras Bulba

Andrew had never seen before. Wine stalls were overhauled, honey, brandy and beer taken off without payment, their owners being only too glad to escape whole. The night was spent in shouting songs of victory, and the rising moon long looked down on bands of musicians, who, accompanied by choristers, kept in Sietch for the church services and singing of Cossack valour, went through the streets playing on their mandores, torbans, and guitars. But drink and confusion got the better of those strong heads at last. Here, there, and everywhere Cossacks rolled on to the ground, comrade hugged comrade with tearful tenderness, and staggering, fell to earth with his friend. There a group found repose together; there another, preferring solitude, lay down in a trough. The last and toughest still shouted out something incoherent; but drink got the best of him, he rolled over—and all Sietch slept.

CHAPTER IV.



NEXT day Taras Bulba consulted with the new commander as to how they might spur the men of Sietch to action. The commander was a clever, cunning Cossack, knew his men thoroughly, and began by saying, "We can't break our oath—no, not by any means." Then after a pause he went on, "It matters not, we must think of something—the Cossacks must meet. Yea, but at no order of mine—just of their own free will. Thou

Taras Bulba

know'st how to do that—then I and the seniors will run out into the square as if we knew nothing.”

In less than an hour the drums were rolling. Cossacks, drunk and sober, answered the summons, and a million caps bobbed in the square. All asked the questions, “Who? What for?” “What business are they going to discuss?” But nobody answered them. At last murmurs were heard here and there, “Lo! all Cossack strength lieth idle: there is no war. The seniors are grown lazy and idle; they have blinded their eyes with fat. Verily there is no right in the world.” Others who had begun by listening also joined in. “Ay, there is, in very truth, no right in the world.” The seniors looked sheepish when they heard this, and at last the commander stepped forward and began—

“Gentlemen of Sietch, do ye allow me to hold discourse?”

Taras Bulba

“We do.”

“Lo, there is a matter that calleth for our grave consideration : ye, virtuous gentlemen, know maybe as well as I that many of our comrades waste more money in the pothouses of the Jews and their own brethren than the very devil would believe. There is yet another matter that calleth for our grave consideration : we have many lads among us who have never seen with their own eyes what manner of thing war is, and as ye know, gentlemen, a lad can't fight when there is no war. What manner of Cossack will he be if he never beats a Mussulman ?”

“He speaks right well,” thought Bulba.

“But think not, gentlemen, that I say this for ye to break peace; I only remark it. Besides, we have a temple of God, and 'twere a sin to speak of such a thing. Here, thanks to God's mercy, Sietch hath stood this many a year, and to this time, not only

Taras Bulba

hath the outside of our church been without embellishment, but not even a bit of silver hath been added to the pictures inside. It hath only profited by what Cossacks of other parts have left to the popes; yea, and the gifts were poor, for the givers had drunk it nearly all before they died. But I say it not that we may make war against the Mussulmans; we promised the Sultan peace, and should greatly sin, as we swore after our own laws."

"Why doth he wander like that?" thought Bulba.

"Yea, we can't begin war; knightly honour forbids it. But this is what I think, after my poor understanding. Let us send the young men alone, in boats. Yea, let them cruise about the Levant for a term. How think ye, gentlemen?"

"Take us all! take us all!" yelled the crowd. "We'll lay down our heads for the Faith."

Taras Bulba

The commander looked rather blank at this; he had not intended to set all Sietch on fire. If all went it would be impossible to keep peace.

“Let me hold another discourse,” he said.

“Enough!” cried the men of Sietch; “thou’lt say nothing better.”

“When it is so, so let it be. I am but the servant of your will. Ye have settled it, and according to Holy Writ the voice of the people is the voice of God. It is not possible to think better than the people think. There is but one thing: ye know full well, gentlemen, that the Sultan will not fail to punish our young men’s pleasure; and meanwhile we would be prepared and our forces fresh, and there would be no taking us by surprise. The Tartars may come down on us when we are away. They’re but heathen dogs, they will not strike to our faces; nay, nor dare to go to the farmer at home—but from behind; one

Taras Bulba

Tartar will strike for five, yea, for more than five. Yea, if it come to that, to speak truly, our store of boats is not big enough for all; and not enough powder is ground either. But nevertheless I agree with ye. I am but the servant of your will."

The cunning ataman was silent. The groups began to discuss the question, and the divisional atamen to hold counsel, and as there were happily not many drunken ones among them, they decided to take the commander's good advice. Some of the Cossacks immediately crossed to the opposite bank of the river, to the military stores, where treasure and part of the firearms taken from the enemy were hidden with great secrecy under the water and among the reeds; others went to the boats to prepare them for the voyage, and the shore suddenly became crowded with Cossacks. Carpenters appeared, axe in hand. Sunburned, broad-shouldered, sturdy-limbed men,

Taras Bulba

some grizzled and others black-haired, rolled up their trousers, and wading knee-deep in the water, pulled the canoes to shore with strong ropes; others brought all sorts of dried woods. Here they lined the "sea-gulls" with planks; there, turning the boats bottom upwards, they began to chalk and tar them; others tied large bundles of reeds to the boat sides, after the Cossack fashion, that they might not capsize in the sea waves; farther up, on the strand, they kindled fires and boiled pitch in copper pans. The old and experienced taught the young. Noise and the clatter of work arose on all sides; the whole shore tossed and shook as if it were alive. Just then a large ferry-boat was making for the island, the people in it waving their arms long before they were near the shore. The disorderly crew—most of them had nothing more than their shirts and the short pipes that were in their mouths—looked as if they had either been

Taras Bulba

through great privations or else revelling so lustily that they had revelled away all they had on their backs. A man of some fifty years, a short, thick-set Cossack, stood apart from the rest, and shouted and gesticulated more lustily than his companions, but his words were drowned by the workmen's noise and clatter.

“And what brings ye here?” asked the head ataman, when the boat had reached the shore. The workers paused and listened, hammer and chisel in hand, with great interest.

“Bad tidings,” shouted the burly Cossack from the ferry-boat.

“What bad tidings?”

“Do ye allow me, gentlemen of the Land-beyond-the-Rapids, to hold discourse?”

“Speak!”

“Or perchance ye will call a council?”

“Speak, we are all here!” And all the Cossacks crowded together.

Taras Bulba

“And have ye heard nought of what is doing in the Hetman’s territories?”

“And what?” asked a divisional ataman.

“Eh, what! Seemingly the Tartars have stuffed up your ears, that ye hear nothing.”

“Then tell us all that is doing there.”

“Ay, things are doing there that neither born nor baptized ever yet saw.”

“Then tell us, ye dog’s son, what is doing,” roared some one in the crowd, who had evidently lost patience.

“Such times are come upon us that even our churches are not our own.”

“How not our own?”

“How? The Jews let them out on hire! If ye don’t pay the Jews beforehand, ye can have no mass!”

“What art thou raving about?”

“And if a Jewish dog putteth not his mark on the Paschal food with his unclean hands, then ye cannot have the food consecrated.”

“He lies, brethren! he lies! It cannot be

Taras Bulba

that an unclean Jew putteth his mark on the Paschal food.”

“Listen! I’ll tell ye yet more: and now the Roman priests drive in their carts through all the Ukraine. But the trouble lieth not in that they drive in their carts; the trouble lieth in this—that they harness no horses to them, but orthodox Christians. Listen, and I’ll tell ye yet more. The Jewesses sew themselves petticoats out of our popes’ vestments. That is what is doing in the Ukraine, gentlemen! And ye stay beyond the Rapids, idling; yea, methinks the Tartar hath put ye in such trembling that ye have neither ears nor aught, and cannot know what is passing in the world.”

“Stop, stop!” interrupted the head ataman, who had stood silent, his eyes on the ground, like all Cossacks, who never interrupted in serious matters, but kept silence, quietly gathering their indignation.

“Stop, stop, and I will say a word. And

Taras Bulba

ye—methinks the devil must have drubbed your father thus—what were ye doing? had ye no swords or what? How did you come to let such iniquities pass?”

“Eh, let such iniquities pass! And ye’d tried too with fifty thousand Poles against ye! Yea, and why hide our sins? There were some dogs amongst us, too, who’ve changed their religion.”

“And your hetman and colonels—what were they about?”

“Our colonels have been about such things as God preserve us from.”

“What?”

“This—that our hetman, broiled in a copper pot, is in Warsaw; that our colonels’ heads and arms are being carried about to all the fairs and markets in the country, that the whole nation may see them. That’s what the colonels have been about!”

The crowd was surging. At the beginning there had been silence, as before the break-

Taras Bulba

ing of a storm; now it lifted up its voice, and the whole shore spoke.

“What! Jews let out Christian churches on hire! Roman priests harness orthodox Christians to their carts! What? Let the cursed unbelievers torture on Russian soil! Let them treat our colonels and hetman like that! Nay, it shall not be! it shall not be!”

Such words ran through the crowd; the Cossacks were aroused, and realized their strength. It was not the excitement of a shallow people, but the indignation of sturdy natures, which, though not easy to rouse, burned long and stubbornly when once excited.

“Let’s hang up all Jewry,” they shouted. “They shall learn to sew their Jewesses’ skirts from our popes’ vestments. They shall learn to mark our Paschal food! Let’s drown the heathens, all of ’em! To the Dneiper with them!”

Taras Bulba

These last words, spoken by one of the crowd, ran through it like lightning, and the human mass rushed to the suburbs to massacre the Jews.

The poor sons of Israel, losing the little courage they had, took refuge in empty brandy-casks, stoves, and even under the Jewesses' petticoats. But the Cossacks found them all out.

"Most illustrious gentlemen!" cried one long thin Jew, thrusting his ugly head, which was shaking with fear, from a group of friends. "Most illustrious gentlemen! let us say one word, one little word! We will tell you something you never heard before, of such import, of such import, as I can't express!"

"Well, let them speak," said Bulba, who always liked to hear what the accused had to say.

"Illustrious gentlemen!" began the Jew. "Yea, such gentlemen were never seen

Taras Bulba

before, my God! never before. Such virtuous, brave, and excellent gentlemen were never yet on the earth." His shaky voice broke with fright. . . . "How could anybody ever think of doing any harm to a Cossack from the Land-beyond-the-Rapids? They are none of ours, those that take usufruct in the Ukraine. My God, they're none of ours. They are by no means Jews; the Devil knoweth what they are—they are only good to spit upon and utterly cast out. And these men here say the same thing—No, Shlema; no, Shum?"

"It's true, by God it's true!" affirmed Shlema and Shum, their long coats in tatters and their faces the colour of clay.

"Never yet," the lanky Jew went on, "never yet have we had traffic with your enemies; as to the Catholics, we know them not. The Devil take them all! . . . The Dnieper Cossacks are even as our brethren."

"What! the Dnieper Cossacks your

Taras Bulba

brethren?" yelled one of the crowd. "It's no use trying to put it off, you cursed Jews! Into the Dnieper with 'em, gentlemen! Drown them all, the unbelievers!"

This was a signal. The Jews were promptly seized and thrown into the water. Their piteous cries filled the air, but the stern knights only laughed to see their slippered feet flapping above the river. The unlucky orator who had been the cause of this disaster threw off his coat so that no one should catch him by its long skirt, and dressed in a skimping, pied vest, grasped Bulba's legs, wailing—

"Great gentleman, most illustrious sir! I knew your dead brother; he was a soldier who adorned all chivalry. I—I did give him eight hundred sequins, when he needed to be ransomed from bondage in Turkey."

"Thou didst know my brother?" demanded Bulba.

Taras Bulba

“By God, I knew him. He was a large-hearted gentleman.”

“What is thy name?”

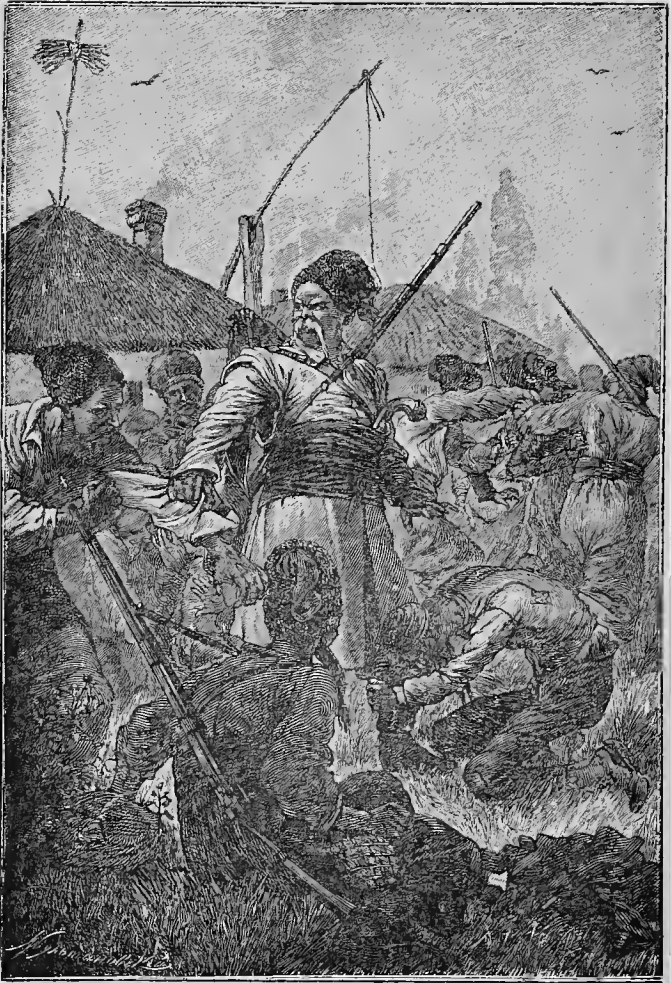
“Jankel.”

“Well,” and after a moment’s reflection, he turned to the Cossacks and said—

“There will always be time to hang this Jew, when he needeth it; give him to me for to-day.” So saying, he ordered the Jew to go to the baggage-train, where his regiment stood.

“Now get under this cart. Lie there and don’t get out. And do ye, my brethren, keep him where he is.”

This done, Bulba went to the square, where all the Cossacks had gathered long ago. The shore and boats were all deserted, for it was now a question of an expedition by land, and not by sea. The Cossack seagulls were no longer needed, but horses and waggons. Now all, both old and young, were eager to be on the



“THERE WILL ALWAYS BE TIME TO HANG THIS JEW.”

Taras Bulba

march ; atamen, seniors, captains and men were one in this eagerness to make straight for Poland, to avenge their wrongs and the insults to the true Faith and to Cossackdom, to loot the towns, to set fire to fields and villages, and to spread their fame far and wide over the steppes. All were armed and belted. The head ataman had grown a yard taller. He was no longer the timid fulfiller of a free nation's fickle will, but a despot, who only knew how to command. All the independent, idle knights were drawn up in orderly rows, and respectfully bowed their heads, without daring to raise their eyes, when their commander gave orders. He gave them quietly, without hiding or bungling, but with conviction, as a veteran Cossack of long experience and as one who had led many an enterprise decided upon in solemn conclave.

“Look ye to everything, look carefully to everything,” so he said ; “to your

Taras Bulba

waggon and tar-pots, and test your weapons. Take little raiment with ye: two shirts and two pairs of trousers to each Cossack, yea, and a pot of hasty-pudding and ground millet. Let no man carry more than this, for all the provender ye need will be in the waggon. Let each Cossack take two horses, yea, we must take two hundred yoke of oxen, for oxen will be needed for the fords and swamps. Yea, gentlemen, keep order above all things. I know there be those among ye who, when God putteth booty into their hands, must needs keep the silks and other stuffs for leg-wrappers. Cast off all such devilish ways! Throw away the petticoats and only take weapons, and since they can serve ye, ducats and silver, for they are ever useful and serve on every occasion. Yea, gentlemen, I tell ye beforehand that if any one of ye get drunk upon the road there'll be no trial for him; I'll have him fastened

Taras Bulba

by the neck to the baggage-train, no matter who he be, even to the brightest Cossack of the whole army; he will be shot down like a cur, and thrown out of the camp without burial to be food for carrion, for a man who getteth drunk on the road is not worthy of Christian burial. Young men, listen to your seniors in all things! If a ball or a sword scratcheth the head, or any other part of the body, pay no heed to such a matter, but mix powder and a little weak brandy in a cup and drink it off at one draught—all will pass and ye'll have no fever. As for a wound, if it be not over deep, do ye but put some earth, first mixing it in the palm of the hand with a little spittle, and the wound will dry up. And now to work, lads, to work! Yea, tarry not, but get ye to work right away!"

So spoke the commander, and he had scarcely finished speaking when the Cossacks betook themselves to work. Sietch

Taras Bulba

had grown sober, and it was as useless to look for a drunken Cossack as if such a thing were unknown. Some mended the wheels and tarred the carts, some loaded the waggons with ammunition and other stores, some drove horses and oxen in from the steppe. Noise and bustle reigned—the neighing of horses, the report of guns, the clanking of swords and the creaking of waggons, mingled with the shouts of the Cossacks, arose from all sides. And soon the army stretched far, far along the steppe, and he who would run from the head to the tail thereof would have far to go. Then the popes sang the “Te Deum” in the little wooden church, sprinkled the Cossacks with holy water, and all kissed the cross.

When the camp had wound and stretched itself outside Sietch, all the Cossacks looked back upon her, saying, “Farewell, mother, farewell! God guard ye from all harm!”

As they passed the suburb, Taras Bulba

Taras Bulba

noticed that Jankel the Jew had managed to set up a stall, where flints, bolts, powder, everything in fact that a man on the march can want, even to white and black bread, were exposed for sale.

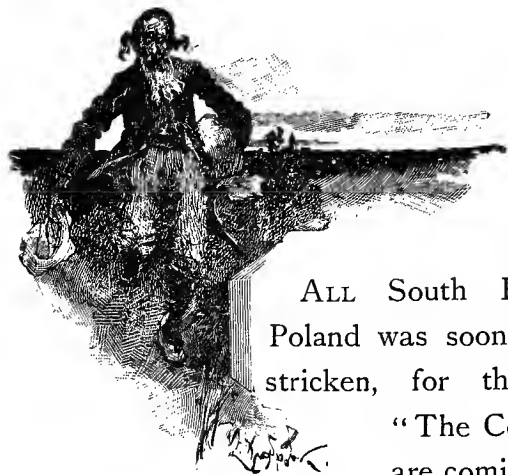
“The Devil take that Jew!” muttered Bulba; and riding up to the stall, he shouted, “What dost thou here, villain? Wouldst be shot down like a sparrow?”

But Jankel went up to his preserver and whispered with an air of secrecy—

“Only, I beg you, sir, say nought to the Cossacks. My own waggon is in the baggage-train, full of all sorts of provisions that I’ll sell on the road cheaper than any Jew ever sold yet, my God, I will, sir!”

Shrugging his shoulders, Taras rode back to the army, wondering much at Jewish energy.

CHAPTER V.



ALL South Eastern Poland was soon panic-stricken, for the cry, "The Cossacks are coming! the

Cossacks-from-beyond-the-Rapids are coming!" ran from end to end.

All who could, arose and fled, for in those dangerous times men built neither castle nor fortress, and when his hut had been burned by one horde, he put up another like it without delay or unnecessary

Taras Bulba

expense, as the Tartars were sure to destroy it before long.

So everybody ran away. Some, exchanging plough and oxen for horse and gun, joined the nearest regiment, taking all his movable property with him; others met the enemy on the road; but most of them made off betimes. They all knew by bitter experience how useless it was to offer any resistance to the savage horde called the Transrapidian Army, that knew so well how to exchange their disorderly independence for well organized discipline in time of war. Their cavalry were well mounted, their foot trudged stolidly behind the baggage train, and they all marched at night, spending the day in some deserted spot, or in the forests, of which there was no lack in those times. Their spies and scouts did their work so thoroughly that the invaders generally turned up where they were least expected and changed everything. Whole

Taras Bulba

villages were burned to the ground, horses and cattle either killed on the spot or driven off to the baggage train, and it seemed as though the Cossacks feasted even more than they fought. People's hair would stand on end to-day if they saw the traces those fierce Cossacks left behind them, and murdered men, mutilated women and flayed fugitives told the Poles that the invaders were paying their debts in hard cash. When the prelate of a certain monastery heard of their approach, he sent two monks to tell them they were acting unlawfully, that there was a treaty between them and the government, and that they were neglecting their duty not only to their sovereign, but to all national laws.

“Tell the bishop,” said the head ataman, “tell the bishop from me and all my men to fear nothing, for the Cossacks have but lighted and begun to smoke their pipes.”

Soon after the stately abbey was alight,

Taras Bulba

and its huge Gothic windows rose stern and gaunt from a sea of hungry flames.

Crowds of monks, women and Jews fled to the towns that boasted anything approaching a garrison or fortification.

The tardy help the government sent consisted of a few regiments who either failed to find the enemy or else were afraid of them, and after the first encounter fled on their wretched horses. Then several of the royal leaders, proud of former conquests, determined to unite their forces and make a stand against the enemy. . . . It was here that the young Cossacks had the best chance of showing their mettle. Leaving the plunder of the weaker part of the enemy, they fought hand to hand with these daring braggarts, whose loose-sleeved mantles streamed in the wind as they flaunted on their fiery horses. And the novices had good reason to be pleased with the issue, for many a rich trapping and costly weapon

Taras Bulba

fell into their hands. The campaign, short as it was, had changed these half-fledged nestlings into men, and their faces, that had worn the softness of youth one month ago, were now stern and hard. It did old Bulba's heart good to see his sons ever amongst the first. Ostap's was the face of a man whom no difficulties could quail, and who never flinched or faltered before any danger. With a coolness beyond his two-and-twenty years he measured the peril of any situation he found himself in, and found means to adapt himself to it in such a way that he never failed to master it in the end. All he did he did with the assurance of an experienced soldier, and nobody who knew him could doubt that he was a born leader. He overflowed with strength, and young as he was, his bravery and other knightly qualities showed the broad forces of a lion.

“Oh, yea! he'll be a good colonel in

Taras Bulba

time," old Taras would say. "Eh, eh, a good colonel; and what is more, he'll take his own father by the belt."

The bewitching music of ball and blade intoxicated Andrew. He could not measure his own or his opponent's strength, for battle meant nothing more to him than wild, sensuous pleasure, and it was as a feast when men's faces flushed and their eyes flashed with the lust of blood, when heads whirled and horses fell; like a man drunk with wine, he would fling himself where the swish of the balls and the flash of swords were thickest, blindly striking down all he met and never heeding the vanquished. More than once he astonished his father when, burning with passion, he attempted things that sane men would shrink from, and performed feats with this mad prowess of his that astonished warriors grown grey in arms. Even old Taras would marvel and say—

"And he's a good soldier too. The

Taras Bulba

enemy won't catch him! It's not Ostap; but a good fighter all the same."

Hearing that there was plenty of booty and plunder in Dubno, they decided to attack that town, and appeared before its walls after a two days' march. The inhabitants, however, were determined to defend it to the last, and perish in sight of their homes rather than let in the enemy. The town was defended by a high rampart, stone walls, houses and a stockade; the garrison, which was a strong one, realized the gravity of the situation. Neither were the citizens and nobles who happened to be in the town idle. All gathered together on the ramparts, and scowled down at the enemy with hatred and resistance in their eyes. Even the women did their share of the work, and stones, barrels, boiling water, and blinding sand rained down upon the Cossacks. The latter, who disliked sieges and were always weak in strategy, did not

Taras Bulba

prolong the conflict. The ataman soon ordered them to retreat, saying—

“There’s nought to be done here, brethren. We’ll just let them be, but may I be a pagan Tartar and no Christian if we let as much as one of ’em out of that town. Yea, let them all starve like the dogs they are.”

So they ceased the attack, and having nothing better to do, began to lay the neighbourhood waste. The citizens were filled with horror when they saw them fire the hayricks and drive horses into the standing corn, where the full ears hung enticingly and the heavy crops had promised the farmers a good harvest. Then they drew their waggons in double rows round the town, arranged the camp into divisions, as if they were at home in Sietch, smoked their pipes, exchanged booty, played leap-frog and odds-and-ends, and looked at Dubno with murderous indifference.

Taras Bulba

At dusk the cooks boiled the supper over the freshly-kindled watch-fires, which the sentries kept burning all night long. But the Cossacks soon grew tired of the idleness and prolonged temperance leaguer demanded, and the commander began to order wine (which found its way into the baggage train when the campaign was not too heavy) to be served out with the evening meal. The younger Cossacks, especially Bulba's sons, fretted at this inaction. Andrew grew so gloomy that Taras said—

“Thou’st indeed a blockhead. Patience, Cossack, ye’ll be ataman yet. Action alone never made a soldier; a good warrior must learn how to endure all things, even idleness.”

But the fiery youth and the old man were made of different stuff and looked at the matter with other eyes.

Meanwhile, Bulba's regiment, commanded by Captain Tookatch, joined the army.

Taras Bulba

Two captains, a scrivener, and other officers came with them, bringing their number up to close upon four thousand men. This included a great many volunteers, who had joined as soon as they heard what was afoot. The captains brought Taras Bulba's sons their old mother's blessing and two little cypress relics from the Kiev monastery. The brothers put on the relics and saddened when they thought of their mother. What did her blessing mean, what would it bring them? Would it bring them victory and a joyful home-coming, with booty and eternal glory? Or did it——

But the future hangs all unknown before us, like the autumn mist that rises from the marsh : birds fly blindly in it, searching each other with flapping wings, and in vain ; for the dove cannot see the hawk, nor the hawk find the dove, and neither knows how near he flies to his ruin.

Ostap had long since gone to his division,

Taras Bulba

but Andrew, heavy-hearted, though he knew not why, still lingered. The Cossacks were already asleep, for evening had long since faded and the beautiful July moon filled the air. Andrew, too restless to join his division or lie down where he was, watched the picture before him. Countless stars, sharp and steely, glinted in the heavens, and the earth was strewn with waggons, tar-barrels and loot. Far and near on the grass, by the waggons, on and under them, the sleeping warriors lay in different positions. One had put a ball under his head, another a cap, whilst a third was content with his comrade's side. Sword, gun, steel and pipe lay by each sleeper. Like huge grey boulders scattered over the field the oxen lay in heavy whitish masses, their legs turned under them. The snoring of the warriors that rose from all sides was answered by the horses fretting on the steppe at their hobbles. And yet, in spite

Taras Bulba

of all this, something that was grand and awesome mingled with the midsummer night. It was the distant glare that arose from the burning neighbourhood. Here a quiet broad ribbon of fire overspread the sky; there it had met something inflammable, and fanned by a sudden breeze, burst and rushed to the stars, till its jagged, flaming tongues died under the distant sky. A blackened monastery stood like some stern, scowling monk, every flame lighting up its gloomy grandeur. There, too, burned the garden, and it seemed to Andrew as though he heard the hissing of the smoky trees. Sometimes the flames gave a cluster of plums a phosphoric tinge, or daubed the ripening pears with red-gold patches. Here and there, hanging from a bough or ruined wall, he saw the charred remains of some luckless monk or Jew who had perished with the building. A flock of birds hovered high above the fire like black dots against

Taras Bulba

a flaming background. The beleaguered city slept; its towers, roofs, and stockade lighted up by the glare of the burning ruins, were silent.

Andrew wandered round the Cossack camp. The watch fires were all but out, and the sentries, who had eaten all they could find with true Cossack appetite, dozed by the glowing embers. He wondered at this carelessness, thinking it well there was nothing to be feared from the enemy. But at last he, too, got on one of the waggons, and lay there, his head on his arms and his face turned skywards, watching the stars. The air was clear and limpid, and the constellation bathed in light. He dozed fitfully, when slumber drew her veil over the heavens, but he always awoke and all was clear again. . . . Then some strange form seemed to be hovering over him; thinking it was the result of his own drowsy imagination, he opened his eyes. A dry, wasted

Taras Bulba

face was bent so low over him that he could see a pair of wild eyes peering into his. The loose black hair, that hung in tangled masses, the strange glint in the eyes, and the wan, swarthy, sharp-featured face surely belonged to some spectre. Stretching a hand out towards his gun, he asked, almost nervously—

“Who art thou? If some evil spirit, be gone! If human, I’ll shoot ye, for ’tis no time for jests.”

Instead of answering, the spectre held up a warning finger.

Withdrawing his hand, Andrew looked at it again. The long hair, neck, and half-naked bust belonged to a woman, whilst the high cheekbones that projected over the wan cheeks, and the narrow eyes, proclaimed her a foreigner, though the more Andrew looked at her the more familiar she seemed.

“Who are ye?” he said impatiently, at

Taras Bulba

last. "Methinks I have known or seen ye somewhere."

"Two years ago in Kiev," she replied.

"Two years ago in Kiev," repeated Andrew, trying to recall the old bursary days, and looking steadily at the woman's face. "I know," he shouted at the top of his voice; "ye are the Tartar woman—the Voevoda's daughter's slave!"

"Hush! Oh, hush!" she whispered, looking about to see if Andrew's shout had not aroused the sleepers near them.

"Speak, speak how and why are you come?" whispered Andrew, excitedly. "Where is your mistress? Alive? Here in the town?"

"Yes, she is in the town."

"In the town!" he almost shouted, feeling the blood suddenly rush to his heart. "What is she doing in the town?"

"The Voevoda is here; since well-nigh two years he has lived in Dubno."

Taras Bulba

“And is she married? But speak, how strange ye are! How fares she now?”

“She hath eaten nothing for two days.”

“What?”

“Ay, and it’s long since the townsfolk saw as much as a crust of bread. They have but the earth to eat.”

Andrew looked at her in silent astonishment. The woman went on—

“My mistress saw ye with the other Cossacks under the ramparts, and said to me, ‘Go and tell the knight to come to me, if he still remembers; if he hath forgotten, ask him to give thee a piece of bread, for I will not see my mother perish. ’Tis better for me to die first and she afterwards. Beg of him, and cling to his knees and feet; he, too, hath an old mother, maybe he will give you some for her sake.’”

Many feelings arose and swelled in the young Cossack’s heart.

Taras Bulba

“But how did you get here? Which way did ye come?” he asked.

“By the underground passage.”

“Is there an underground passage?”

“There is.”

“Where?”

“Ye will not betray me, knight?”

“I swear by the Holy Cross.”

“Down yonder bank and across the stream, there where the rushes grow.”

“Does it lead right into the town?”

“Straight into the Abbey.”

“Come, we will go at once!”

“But a bite of bread! For the love of Christ and the Holy Mary, a bite of bread!”

“Well, well! ye shall have the bread. Stand still here by the waggon. Nay, better still, lie down in it. Nobody will see ye, for they’re all asleep. I’ll be back in a minute,” and with fast beating heart he went to the waggons which composed the divisional larder.

Taras Bulba

All the past, all that the Cossack bivouac and fierce campaign had deafened, now rushed to the surface and drowned the present in its turn. Once more proud woman rose, as from a deep, dark sea, before him; once more he saw her shimmering arms, laughing eyes and lips, the dark tresses of her hair and the suppleness of her girlish limbs. They had never really faded from his heart, never altogether died out; they had but turned aside to give place to other strong emotions. Often and often had they troubled the young Cossack's sleep, and he had lain awake, he knew not why.

Now, at the thought that he was to see her so soon, his heart beat faster and faster and his strong knees shook. When he reached the waggons he had quite forgotten his errand, and stood some time, his hand to his head, wondering what had brought him there. Suddenly he shivered from head

Taras Bulba

to foot, for he remembered that she was starving. But when he took up a huge loaf of black bread, the thought struck him that such fare, though welcome to a rough Cossack, would be too coarse for a delicately nurtured woman. Only the day before the ataman had rated the cooks for boiling enough buckwheat for three meals. Sure of finding some pudding left in the coppers, he took his father's pannikin and walked over to the divisional kitchen, consisting of two huge copper boilers, under which the embers were still glowing. They were both empty, a proof of the men's superhuman appetite, as the division was one of the smallest in the army. As Andrew found copper after copper scraped clean, he thought of the proverb, "Cossacks are like children: when there is little they'll eat it all, when there's a lot they'll leave nothing." What was to be done? He thought he had seen a sack of white bread, taken from the burned

Taras Bulba

monastery, lying in his father's baggage waggon; but he only went there to find it was gone. Ostap had taken it for a pillow, and lay on the grass snoring loud enough for the whole army. Seeing the sack under his brother's head, Andrew pulled it away with a force that thumped that member on the ground and woke Ostap. Sitting up, he roared at the top of his voice—

“Catch him, catch him, the Polish devil! Stop the horse, stop the horse!”

“Be quiet, or I'll kill ye!” whispered his terrified brother, swinging the sack over his head.

But Ostap needed no such threat, for he lay down again with a snore that shook the grass.

Andrew looked furtively about him, afraid to see if his brother's sleepy nonsense had not aroused the sleepers. Only one touzled head peered out from a neighbouring

Taras Bulba

waggon, and as even that soon disappeared again, he turned away with his burden after a moment's suspense, and went back to the Tartar slave, who lay half dead with fright.

“Get up; they're all asleep, don't be afraid. Can ye take a loaf if I find them too many for me?” and slinging the sack over his shoulders, he caught up another one full of millet from a neighbouring waggon, took the loaves he had wanted the slave to carry, and staggering slightly under his heavy load, walked boldly between the rows of sleeping Cossacks.

“Andrew!” called old Bulba, as they passed him.

With sinking heart and trembling limbs, Andrew stopped.

“What?” he asked, faintly.

“There's a lass with ye! Ay, ye'll get it when I get up. The wench'll do ye no good,” the old man went on, raising him-



“WITH SINKING HEART AND TREMBLING LIMBS, ANDREW STOPPED.”

Taras Bulba

self on his elbow and looking at the muffled slave.

Feeling more dead than alive, Andrew stood for a few minutes too frightened to look at his father. When he did so he saw the old man had lain down again and was already fast asleep. He crossed himself, and the fear left him as suddenly as it had come. He turned to the slave; she stood like some dark granite statue, wrapped in drapery; only her eyes, fixed and glazed as those of a corpse, were lighted up by the glare of the distant fire. He pulled her by the arm, and the silent pair went on, never ceasing to look behind them until they reached the bottom of the high, steep bank where flowed a sluggish stream, choked with sedge and mounds. Once here they were well out of sight of the Cossack camp, and when Andrew looked back, all he saw was a high wall topped with a few stalks, and the moon that hung like an inverted sickle

Taras Bulba

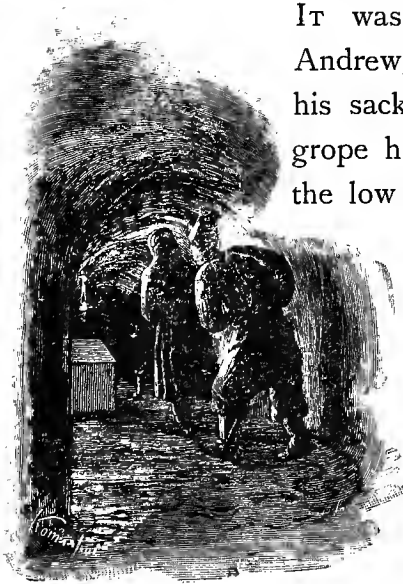
amongst the stars. A breeze blowing from the steppes hailed the approach of dawn, but not a cock-crow was to be heard far or near, for all the fowl of the district had long since disappeared. . . . As they crossed the stream by means of a narrow plank, the opposite bank rose before them—sheer, steep, and higher than the one they had just left. Though the ramparts here were low, and there were no sentries to be seen; this was the strongest point of the fortification, for the thick walls of the monastery towered above them. The small space between stream and walls was sown with rank grass and rushes, whilst the summit was strewn with the bits of a hedge and other remnants of a garden. Burdocks filled the foreground; behind were weeds and thistles and tall sunflowers that towered above their neighbours. Here the slave took off her shoes and gathered up her skirts, for the place was swampy and full

Taras Bulba

of water. Wading through the rushes, they came at last to a heap of brushwood that hid the entrance to the underground passage. They pushed it aside. The slave crouched through the opening, which was little bigger than the door of a baker's oven, Andrew, bent almost double, followed her with his burden, and they suddenly found themselves in total darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was as much as Andrew, hampered with his sacks, could do to grope his way through the low tunnel.



“It will soon be light,” said the slave; “we are coming to the candle I put down.”

And it was not long before a faint light appeared on the earthy walls. A few seconds after they reached a small open space evidently used as a chapel, for an altar stood against the wall,

Taras Bulba

on which, barely visible in the faint light of the silver lamp that hung over it, was a defaced and almost obliterated picture of the Madonna of the Roman Church. A high copper candlestick, filled with trimmers, snuffers, and extinguisher, stood on the ground near the altar.

The slave picked it up, lighted the candle at the lamp, and when the flame had grown a little stronger, led the way down the passage. Now in the glare of the light, now like Geravdo's "Dalle Notti," thrown into black shadow, the Cossack's handsome face, overflowing with youth and health, contrasted strangely with the Tartar slave's sharp, wan features. Here the tunnel was lofty enough to enable Andrew to walk upright, and he looked on the damp walls, that reminded him of the catacombs in Kiev, with interest. Here, as there, were niches and coffins; here too, bones, some powdered by the damp, were strewn about; here too, holy

Taras Bulba

men had sought refuge from the world, with all its noise and pain and sorrow. The tunnel was so damp in places that water lay on the ground, and Andrew often had to wait for his guide, whose strength failed her at almost every step. A piece of bread he gave her only made matters worse, causing such pain that some minutes passed before she was able to move; but at last they reached a small iron door.

“Thank God, we have got here,” panted the slave.

She made a feeble attempt to knock, but Andrew awoke such echoes in the vaulted space behind the door that they had not died away before he heard the jingle of keys and a footstep on stone stairs. The heavy door swung open, and a monk, torch in hand, stood at the bottom of a flight of steps. Andrew involuntarily recoiled at the sight of a Roman monk, whom the Cossacks treated more contemptuously than they did

Taras Bulba

the Jews. The holy man too retreated up a few steps when he saw a Cossack in the doorway, but a few whispered words from the Tartar reassured him. He let them in, fastened the door, and lighted them to the top of the steps, where they found themselves beneath the lofty arches of an abbey.

A monk was on his knees at the high altar, and choristers, dressed in lilac cossacks and white surplices and holding censers in their hands, knelt by him. The monk was praying for miracles, for the town's deliverance, the renewal of patience, and the confusion of the tempter, who had whispered discouragement into men's hearts. Spectre-like women knelt by the benches, or leaned their faint heads against the back of chairs, men prayed in the shadow of the arches.

The rosy dawn, filtered through the painted eastern window, threw many-hued rings of light upon the floor, wrapped altar and dim recess in a halo, tinted the clouds

Taras Bulba

of incense as they rose upwards, and filled the church with brilliance.

Andrew, standing in a dark corner, was looking in astonishment at the miracle the dawn had wrought, when the sounds of a mighty organ swelled louder and louder, till it grew to a thunderous roar; then, breaking into a stream of melody, its notes, thin and sweet as a maiden's voice, were wafted to the highest arch, where they again deepened into a mighty roar as of thunder, and at last were silent. But the echoes lingered in the vaulted roof, and Andrew listened open-mouthed to the strange music till a tug at his coat awoke him. It was the Tartar slave, who told him it was time to go, and following her across the church, he reached the square outside unnoticed by the worshippers. Day had long since broken, and the sun shone brightly over the square, which was empty but for a few wooden stalls which had been loaded with food-stuff less

Taras Bulba

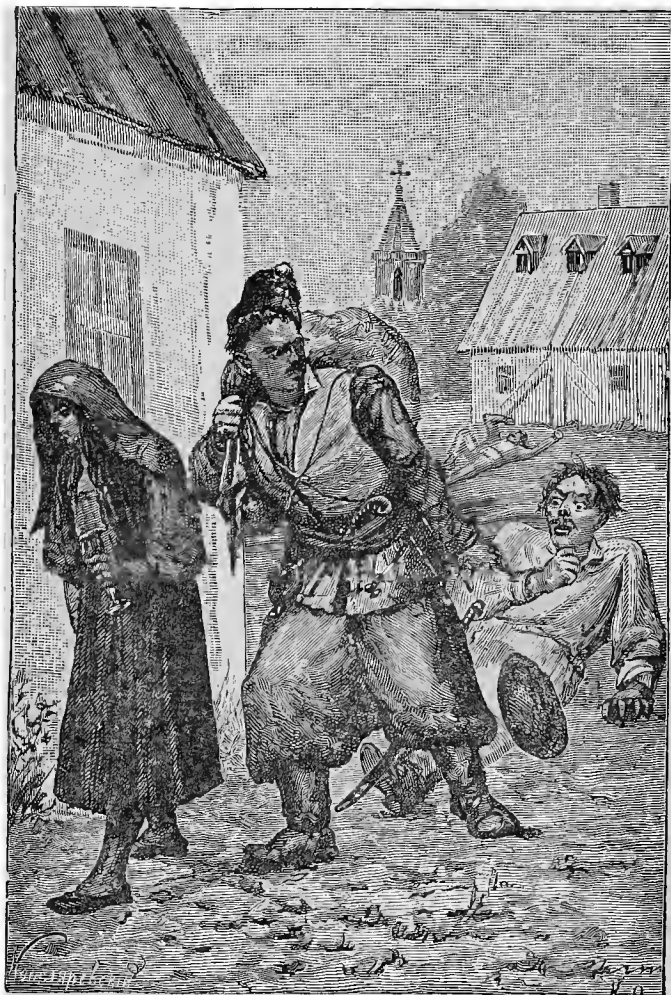
than a week ago. The street, like all others of its time, was unpaved and consisted of hard mud. One-storeyed houses, built of clay and stones, and ornamented from top to bottom with criss-cross beams of wood, overlooked the square. A few such exist in Lithuania and Poland to the present day; but then all the houses were built like that, with high roofs and a hundred chinks and dormer windows. One building, larger than the rest, evidently used as the town-hall and occupying nearly one side of the square, boasted two storeys and a large tower, with a clock that reached to the very roof.

At first sight the place seemed deserted, but Andrew, thinking he heard a groan, saw that two or three people lay stretched on the road at the other side of the square. As he looked again, wondering whether they were alive or dead, he stumbled over something. It was the body of a woman, apparently a Jewess. She must have been

Taras Bulba

young, though her wasted, distorted face made it impossible to tell her age. A red kerchief was wound round her head, and a double row of pearls, real or false, bordered her ear-pieces. The veins on her face were swollen, and a few curled wisps of hair lay on her hollow cheeks. By her side was a tiny child, who had feebly stretched its hand to her wasted breasts, and pressed it peevishly with his fingers when he found no nourishment. But he had long ceased to cry or whine, and only the rise and fall of his stomach showed he was still alive, or rather, had not yet breathed his last.

Turning into the street, they ran against some maniac, who no sooner saw Andrew with his priceless load, than he sprang upon him like a tiger, crying "Bread, bread!" But his strength was less than his fury, and throwing him down, Andrew cast him a loaf. Springing on it like a starving dog, he tore off a large piece and swallowed it. But the



“ANDREW CAST HIM A LOAF.”

Taras Bulba`

food had come too late, and a few seconds after he died in the street in the most horrible convulsions.

Signs of famine met them at every step, for the people, unable to bear the pangs of hunger at home, had taken refuge in the streets, hoping to find the strength they needed in fresh air. An old woman sat by one door, but it was impossible to say whether she was dead or only asleep. She had forgotten herself; hearing and seeing nothing, she sat perfectly still, her head sunk on her breast. An emaciated corpse hung from the roof of the next house. Some poor wretch, unable to bear the pangs of starvation, had hastened his end with a piece of hemp. When Andrew saw these ghastly results of famine, he could not help asking the slave, "Haven't they any means of subsistence left in the town? When people are brought to such a pass as this, they take to what they would think loathsome

Taras Bulba

at any other time, and live on things they would turn aside from as a rule.”

“They’ve eaten up everything,” replied the Tartar. “Not only all the cattle, but the horses and dogs as well. You won’t find as much as a mouse in the town. They never did store anything here, but always got all their food-stuffs from the villages.”

“And why do they try to hold the town when they are all dying such a scurvy death?”

“Ay, ’tis likely the Voevoda would have given in, but early yesterday the general who is in B—— sent a hawk with a letter telling him to hold out, for he awaits another general, so that they may come here together. And now they are expected every minute. Well, and here we are at last.”

Andrew had noticed the house from some little distance, for it was built in the Italian fashion, of thin red bricks. Granite ornamented the windows on the first floor, and

Taras Bulba

the second consisted of a gallery of small arches, between which, as well as on the corners of the building, arms were quartered.

At the foot of a wide flight of steps were two halberdiers, who looked more like statues than men, as they leaned one arm on their halberds, and supported their heads with the other. They were so indifferent to all around them that they did not notice the Cossack and his guide as they mounted the steps, at the head of which stood a sentry, dressed in a complete suit of armour, and holding a breviary in his hand. He looked suspiciously at Andrew, but at a word from the slave let him pass, and returned to his devotions.

The strange pair entered a plainly furnished apartment that evidently served as an ante-room. Lackeys, soldiers, scribes, cupbearers—all the retainers that a Polish noble, whether a soldier or a civilian, found indispensable to his dignity—lounged about

Taras Bulba

in various positions. There was a strong smell of tallow, and though daylight had long since made its way through the grated windows, a couple of candles still spluttered in the high sticks that stood in the middle of the room.

Andrew was about to open a wide oaken door, covered with crests and other carvings, when his guide pointed to a smaller one in a side wall. This led them down a passage and into a room, where Andrew looked curiously about him, for the light that forced its way through a crack in the shutters fell on the crimson draperies, gold cornices, and paintings that adorned the walls.

Bidding him wait here, the slave opened a door into another room where a lamp was burning. He heard the sound of a low voice that made him tremble from head to foot. Through the half-opened door he caught a glimpse of a woman's form, and a long, thick tress of hair that fell on an

Taras Bulba

uplifted arm. Then the slave returned and told him to go in, though how he reached the next room and shut the door he did not know.

Two candles were burning, and a lighted lamp hung before the image, beneath which stood a high altar after the Catholic fashion, with steps to kneel on whilst praying. But this was not what his eyes sought, and turning away from it he saw a woman, who suddenly stiffened and drew back, in the act of coming towards him. He, too, stood motionless. It was not thus that he had thought to see her; it was not she whom he had known two years ago; not she, but some one twice as fair. Then, there had been something incomplete, unfinished; now, it was as if the sculptor had put the last touch to his masterpiece. Then, she had been a charming, wayward child; now, she was a woman in all the fulness of her beauty. Then, her eyes had flashed with a semblance

Taras Bulba

of feeling; now, they were full of feeling itself, and unshed tears veiled them with a glistening film that touched the Cossack's very soul. Her neck, bust, and shoulders were moulded in the symmetry of perfect proportion. Her hair, which used to hang in loose curls, was now gathered into a long, thick plait, part of which had escaped on to her arms, or lay in waving tendrils on her bosom. Every trait was altered, and he searched her face for a familiar one in vain.

Great as her pallor was, it did not mar her beauty, but rather added a dazzling, indefinable charm that filled Andrew's heart with awe and reverence; and he stood motionless before her. She was astonished at the vigour and manly beauty of this young Cossack, whose supple limbs displayed a careless grace even in repose. His clear eyes, framed with brows black and soft as velvet, shone with courage, his tanned

Taras Bulba

cheeks glowed with a virgin blush, and his young moustache was as glossy as silk.

“No, I cannot thank ye, noble cavalier,” she said, and her silver voice shook. “God alone can reward ye, not I, a weak woman.” She dropped her eyes; the snowy lids, fringed with long, black lashes, fell over them, and her fair face was covered in blushes. Andrew did not know what to say. He longed to tell her what was in his heart, and tell it as passionately as it burned there, but could not. His lips trembled, but he could not frame the words. As he felt it was not for him, schooled in a bursary and the camp, to reply to words like those, he despised his Cossack nature.

The Tartar slave entered the room with some of the bread which she had cut up and put upon a golden platter. The girl looked first at the slave and the bread, then she raised her eyes to the Cossack, with a glance that was full of all she could not

Taras Bulba

put into words, and that Andrew understood better than all speech. The chains that had bound his tongue and movements were suddenly loosed; he was about to burst into a torrent of words when the girl turned to her slave.

“And my mother? Hast thou taken some to her?”

“She is asleep.”

“And my father?”

“I have taken some to him. He saith he will come and thank the knight himself.”

The girl took some bread and raised it to her lips. At first Andrew watched her eat with vague delight, then suddenly remembering the maniac who had died from the effects of a piece of bread, he paled and grasped her hand, crying—

“Enough, enough, eat no more! Ye have hungered so long that the bread will poison ye.”

As she put down the food like an obedient

Taras Bulba

child, her eyes met his with a look I would fain describe, but neither chisel nor brush, nor even the most powerful words can express what another sees in a maiden's glance or the tender feeling that prompts it.

“Tsaritsa!” cried Andrew, his soul full of longing, “what need ye, what will ye, command me! Give me the hardest task on earth—I will rush to fulfil it. Bid me do what no man hath done yet, and I will do it—I will give my life for it. To die for ye—I swear it on the holy cross!—
. . . 'twill be so sweet. . . . But I know not how to tell it ye! Three farms are mine, the half of my father's drove, all my mother hath brought him, even what she hideth from him—all, all is mine. Not one of all our Cossacks hath weapons like mine; the hilt of my sword will give me the best drove of horses and three thousand sheep. But all this will I waive, fling, cast off, burn, drown at one word from ye, at one

Taras Bulba

frown from thy fine, black brows! I know my words are poor, untimely and unseemly in such a place. I know it is not for me, born for the bursary and the steppes, to speak as men speak where there are kings and princes and the flower of knighthood. I know that God hath not made ye like us all, like our warriors' maids and wives. I know we are not fit to be thy slaves, for only heaven's angels are fit to serve ye."

With a wonder that grew and turned into hearing, lest she should lose one word of it, the fair Pole listened to the open, simple speech, in which the knight's young, strong soul was reflected as in a mirror, and every syllable, spoken in a voice that came from the bottom of his heart, was wrapped in strength. Bending her beautiful face forward and throwing back her tresses, she listened with parted lips. But when he had finished, and she was about to answer, she remembered that

Taras Bulba

the knight had another meaning for her ; that his father, brothers, and country stood like stern avengers behind him ; that the Cossacks were the dread besiegers who had doomed the town to a horrible death, and her eyes filled with sudden sorrow. She put her broidered kerchief to her face, and it was quickly moistened with her tears. She stood there, her lovely head thrown back, and her white teeth fastened into her lip as if she felt the sudden sting of a venomous insect, but she pressed her kerchief to her eyes, lest he should see her overwhelming grief.

“Speak, speak one word,” pleaded the Cossack, and fire ran through his veins as he took her soft hand in his ; but it lay there motionless, and still she neither moved nor spoke. “But why are ye so sorrowful? Tell me why ye are so sorrowful,” he pleaded.

Then she flung away her kerchief, brushed

Taras Bulba

the hair from her eyes, and broke into a stream of mournful words, speaking with a quiet, quiet voice, like the wind that rises on lonely evenings and spreads through the clumps of water-rushes: their rustling and whispering swell into a doleful moan, till the wayfarer lingers and listens with a vague sadness that heeds not the dying evening, the song of the peasants tramping home from plough and harvest, nor the distant rumble of a passing wain.

“Am I not deserving of eternal pity? Is not the very mother who bore me pitiable? Has not a hard lot fallen to my share? O stony Fate, thou art a stern executioner! Thou hadst thrown everything at my feet, the noblest of the noble, the richest of the rich, the flower of chivalry. They were all free to love me, one and all; they would have held my love in honour. I had but to raise my finger, and the best and fairest and noblest of them would have

Taras Bulba

been my mate! But not with these didst thou choose to bewitch my heart, O cruel Fate! Thou must needs choose a stranger and a foe! O holy Virgin! What sins, what heavy sins have I committed that thou shouldst chastise me thus? My days flowed on in a stream of pleasure and superfluity. The most delicate meats and wines were ever placed before me. And why all this, why? That I might die a death more horrible than the meanest in the kingdom dreams of. And still stern Fate hath not enough! Not enough that I am forced to see my father and mother, for whom I would willingly give my life, perish before my eyes. Not enough of all this! Nay! before I perish, I must needs add to my agonies that of seeing and hearing love and words such as I have never heard before. I must needs rend my heart in pieces, that my hard lot may be still harder, and my short

Taras Bulba

life more wretched, that my last breath may curse my fate, and that thou, holy Virgin, mayst forgive my transgressions.”

She was silent, and her face wore a hopeless, despairing look; all her features were drowned in sorrow; the bent head and downcast eyes shed streams of silent tears and spoke of grief and affliction.

“But such things are not to be heard of,” cried Andrew. “It can not, will not be that the loveliest and best of women should suffer such a death, when she was born that fortune might smile upon her and give her of the best. ’Tis not for ye to die. Ye shall not die! By my birth and all that I hold dear, I swear thou shalt not die. If it come to such a pass that nothing, neither strength, nor prayer, nor manhood can turn away the doom, we’ll die together. And I will die before thee; I will die at thy lovely feet, that

Taras Bulba

perchance I may be joined to thee in death."

"Deceive not thyself and me, brave cavalier," the girl said gently. "I know, alas, I know too well that thou mayst not love me. I know thy debts and thy duty. Thy father and comrades and country all call thee, whilst we—we are thine enemies."

"And what are father, comrades and country to me?" cried Andrew, throwing back his head and drawing himself up like a poplar on the river bank. "Yea, if it comes to that, I will tell thee—I have nothing, nothing, nothing!" he repeated, with the voice and look of a strong, unconquerable Cossack, determined to perform feats impossible to another. "Who said that the Ukraine is my country? My country lies there where my heart is, where lies that that is dearer than all! Thou, *thou* art my country—*thou* art my fatherland. Yea, and I will press that

Taras Bulba

fatherland to my heart and keep it there all my days, and watch well lest some warrior wrest it from me. Ay, and all that is mine, all I have I give up for such a fatherland as this!"

Like a beautiful statue she stood and looked into his eyes, then she fell a-sobbing, and with an impulse that only a generous, imprudent woman, born for unselfish actions, is capable of, threw herself on his neck and clasped him with her white arms.

Just then cries and shouts, with the roll of drums and blare of trumpets, arose from the street below. But Andrew did not hear them; he only felt her fragrant breath and her tears that rained down his face, and the scent of the dark silky hair.

The slave, mad with joy, rushed into the room crying—

"Saved, saved! They have brought in



“ALL I HAVE I GIVE UP FOR SUCH A FATHERLAND AS THIS.”

Taras Bulba

bread and corn and flour, and Cossacks all bound with ropes!"

But neither of them cared who had entered the town, what they had brought with them, or who were the Cossack prisoners. Andrew kissed the fragrant lips that breathed near his, and that did not fail to answer the caress; and in that mutual kiss he tasted such joy as comes to man once in a lifetime.

And the Cossack was lost! Lost to all Cossack chivalry! No more will he return home beyond the Rapids, no more will his father's farm or God's Church see him! No children of his will defend and strengthen the Ukraine! Old Taras will pluck out a tuft of his hair and curse the day and the hour that he begot a son to shame him.

CHAPTER VII.



NOISE and bustle filled the Cossack camp. At first nobody could understand how the enemy entered the town, but when it leaked out

that the Perejaslavski division, encamped by the side gates, had got dead drunk the night before, no one was surprised that half of it had been killed and the other half captured before either realized what was afoot. The neighbouring divisions were

Taras Bulba

aroused by the noise, but before they had time to stand to arms the enemy had entered the town, and the rear had no difficulty in beating back the sleepy, half-drunken Cossacks.

The head ataman summoned his men; and crowding round him, bareheaded and respectful, they listened to his reproaches.

“See, brethren,” he said, “see what the night hath brought ye; see what hops can bring a man to! See how the enemy hath shamed us! Ye are seemingly of those who cannot smell drink without swilling it till Christ’s enemies not only take the breeches off ye without your knowing it, but sneeze in your faces into the bargain.”

Feeling the justice of their ataman’s words, they stood silent, their heads hanging down. Only Kukubenko, a divisional ataman, ventured to express his opinion.

“Wait, Batka!” he cried. “I know it is unlawful to speak when the commander

Taras Bulba

talks to his army, but the matter was not just so, and ye have blamed this Christian army somewhat unjustly. The Cossacks would indeed be worthy of death had they got drunk on the march or in action or on a heavy campaign; but here we've been sitting idle and wearing ourselves out doing nothing but look at the town for weeks. When there is neither fast nor other Christian exercise, nor anything to do, no man can help getting drunk in such a case. There is no sin here. Let us rather teach the enemy not to fall on harmless folk. Yea, we've been too good to them; but now we'll give them such a thrashing that they won't carry as much as their own heels home."

Kukubenko's speech pleased the Cossacks. They raised their heads and nodded them approvingly, with a "Well said, Kukubenko, well said!" And Taras Bulba, who was standing near the commander, asked—

Taras Bulba

“How then, ataman? Is Kukubenko right? What will ye say to him?”

“What will I say to him? I say that the sire who begot such a son was a clown, that’s what I say. It’s not hard to use reproaches, but the wit is to speak a few words that’ll spur a man as ye spur a horse with his belly full of water. I was going to say a few words of cheer too, but Kukubenko hath cut me short.”

“And the commander hath also spoken well,” remarked the first ranks, whilst the grey-haired Cossacks, standing in a row like so many grey pigeons, nodded their heads and pulled their grizzled moustachios, saying, “Well said, well said!”

“Listen, gentlemen,” continued the commander. “Taking strongholds, digging pits and trenches, like the German foreigners do—let the devil take it all! It’s dirty work and not fit for Cossack hands. As far as I can see, the enemy haven’t taken much food

Taras Bulba

into the town, for they had very few waggons. The folk in there are all as hungry as they can be, so they're sure to gobble it all up at once. Whether their saints send them down food from heaven I know not; only God can tell ye that. But those priests of theirs are glib and ready with their tongues—a word from them and the army'll be out of the town. So do ye divide into three parts, and stand on the three roads that lead to the gates. Let five divisions stand before the big gates, and three stand before each of the smaller ones—the Diadkivski and Korsunski divisions in ambush to the left of the camp, Colonel Taras and his regiment in ambush, Scherbinovski and Steblikivski in ambush to the left of the camp, Titarevski and Timoszevski in ambush to the right of the camp. Yea, put the young ones, who have sworn to tear the Poles to pieces, in front. The Pole is empty-headed by nature and hath no

Taras Bulba

patience: to-day, maybe, they'll attack us. And, ye atamen, look ye all to your divisions; fill up the gaps with the remains of the Perejaslavski division; look well to everything; serve out a cup of wine to every sober man, and a loaf to every Cossack—though, truth to tell, ye must be all full, for ye have stuffed so much that I wonder ye did not crack in the night. Yea, and still one word. If any Jewish potboy dare to sell a Cossack as much as a single drop of liquor, I'll nail a sow's ears to his head and hang him with his legs in the air. And now to work, brethren, to work!"

These were the head ataman's commands, and all uncovered and bowed low when they heard them; it was only when they reached their camp and waggons that they ventured to put their caps on again.

Preparations began. Swords and guns were tested, powder flasks filled from the

Taras Bulba

ammunition sacks, waggons brought up and horses led off the steppe.

All the way to his regiment Taras was busy wondering what had become of Andrew. Had they caught him sleeping? No; it was not like him to be taken alive. He went to see if he was amongst the dead, and was so puzzled at not finding him anywhere about, that it was some time before he heard somebody calling him.

“Who wants me?” he asked, and turned round to see Jankel the Jew.

“Mr. Colonel, Mr. Colonel!” he cried in a hurried, panting voice, as if his news was no mere trifle. “I’ve been in the town, Mr. Colonel!”

Looking at Jankel, in wonder that he had got out of it so soon, Taras asked—

“How didst get there?”

“I’ll tell you this minute,” panted the Jew. “When I heard all that noise at daybreak, and the Cossacks began to shoot,

Taras Bulba

I snatched up my coat, and without waiting to put it on ran as hard as I could. I put it on on the way, because I wanted to find out as soon as I could what the noise was about, and why the Cossacks began shooting at daybreak. So I took and ran through the very gates, just as the last of the soldiers went in. I looked about me, and lo! in the front row was Cornet Halondovitch. He's a gentleman I'm very well acquainted with, for he's owed me a hundred ducats these long two years. I went after him to get my money back, and got into the town with him."

"What! thou wast in the town and didst want a debt paid, and he didn't order thee to be hanged like a dog?" exclaimed Bulba.

"Ay, my God! he did indeed want to hang me," answered Jankel. "His servants caught hold of me and put a rope round my neck, but I begged the gentleman to

Taras Bulba

spare my life, for I'd wait for my money as long as ever he liked, yea, and give him more too, if he'd help me to get some from other gentlemen; for Mr. Cornet—you see, sir, I'm telling you everything—Mr. Cornet hasn't a single ducat in his pocket; and though he's got farms and forests, and castles and steppes, he's just as poor as the Cossacks are, for all that. Even now, if it wasn't for the Breslau Jews, he'd had nothing to go to the wars with. That's why he didn't go to the Diet."

"But what didst thou in the town? Didst see any of our men?"

"Ay, ay, I should think I did! There's a lot of our men in the town. There's Isaac and Samuel and Joshua and Moses and——"

"A murrain on the dogs!" cried Bulba, furiously. "How darest thou shove thy Jewish brood on me? I'm asking thee about our Cossacks."

Taras Bulba

“Our Cossacks? No, I didn't see any of them. I only saw Mr. Andrew.”

“Andrew!” shouted Bulba. “What? where? In a cell? in a dungeon? Disgraced? bound?”

“Who would dare to bind Mr. Andrew? He's such a grand knight now—ho, ho! I didn't know him—and gold on his chest and gold on his arms, and a golden shield and a golden cap and a golden stomach, and everywhere and everything gold, just like the sun in springtime, when all the birds in the garden are singing and chirping, and the grass smells so sweet. He's all shining in gold like that. And the Voevoda gave him his very best saddle-horse. Why, that horse is worth two hundred ducats, and——”

“But what did he dress in other people's dress for?”

“Because they were better than his, that's why. He passes up and down, and he

Taras Bulba

teaches them and they teach him, just like the very richest gentleman in all Poland."

"What? Have they been torturing him?"

"I didn't say they'd been torturing him. Don't you understand, sir? He went over of his own free will."

"Who went over?"

"Why, Mr. Andrew."

"Where did he go over?"

"Why, on to their side; he's quite different now."

"Thou liest, swine's ear!"

"How can it be that I lie? Am I a fool or what, that I should lie? Would I lie against my own head? Don't I know they hang a Jew like a dog when he lies to a gentleman?"

"So it appears from what thou sayest that he hath sold his Faith and his country?"

"I didn't say he'd sold anything; I only said he'd gone over to them."

Taras Bulba

“Thou liest, devil’s son, thou liest! Such things are unheard of on Christian soil. Thou’rt raving, thou cur!”

“May the weeds spring up upon my threshold if I rave! May the passers-by spit on the graves of my mother, father, father-in-law, and father’s father and mother’s father, if I rave! If you will, I’ll tell you why he went over to them.”

“Why?”

“The Voevoda hath a beautiful daughter—ay, ay, what a beautiful daughter!”

Here the Jew strove to describe her beauty by twisting up his face, spreading out his arms, rolling his eyes and screwing up his mouth, fully convinced he was conveying an excellent idea of her charms.

“Well, and what of that?”

“He did it for her sake, he went over only for her sake. When a man’s in love it’s all the same to him. He’s like the sole of your foot: you can wet it in water,

Taras Bulba

but the wet runs off as soon as you take it out."

But Bulba paid no heed to these remarks. He remembered how great weak woman's power might be, how many men she had ruined, and that Andrew's was the nature to be most influenced by her; and so he stood a long time without speaking.

"Listen, sir," said the Jew, at last; "I will tell you everything. As soon as I heard all the noise and saw the army march into the town, I took a string of pearls with me, as they were sure to come in handy, for there are beautiful ladies in the town—ay, and noble ones too; and where there is a beautiful and noble lady some one's sure to buy some pearls, even though there's nothing to eat. As soon as the cornet's servants let me go, I ran to the Voevoda's palace to see if I couldn't sell them, and there the Tartar serving-woman told me everything. 'There'll be

Taras Bulba

a wedding here presently,' says she; 'as soon as ever they drive off the Cossacks, and Mr. Andrew hath promised to beat them off very soon.'"

"And thou didst not kill him on the spot, the devil's son!" roared Bulba.

"But why should I kill him? He went over of his own accord. Who's to blame him for it? He's only gone where he feels most comfortable."

"And didst see him face to face?"

"Face to face, my God! Such a fine soldier, finer than any of them. May God give him good health and a long life! He knew me at once, and beckoned to me; and when I went up to him, he says——"

"What did he say?"

"He says . . . first of all he beckoned to me, and then he says . . . he says, 'Jankel!' and I said, 'Mr. Andrew,' and he . . . he says, 'Jankel!' he says, 'tell my father, tell my brother, tell my comrades,

Taras Bulba

tell all the Cossacks, tell *everybody*, that my father is no father of mine, my brother is no brother, my comrades no comrades; and that I will fight against them, that I will fight against them all!"

"Thou liest! devilish Judas! Thou liest, thou dog! Thou didst crucify the very Christ, thou man cursed of God! I'll kill thee, thou Satan! Away! out of my sight, or thou'lt find death here!" roared Bulba, drawing his sword.

The terrified Jew ran off as fast as his thin, dry legs would take him, away through the camp and into the steppe beyond without as much as looking back to see if he was pursued; but Taras, seeing the folly of venting his wrath on the first thing that came to hand, stood where he was and put up his sword. Only now did he remember seeing Andrew walk through the camp with a woman the night before; but though his grey head was bowed, he could not

Taras Bulba

yet believe that such shame had come upon him, and that his own son had sold his Faith and his soul.

At last he took his regiment into ambush behind the forest the Cossacks had not yet burned down. The whole army, horse and foot, advanced to the three roads leading to the three gates. One after the other the divisions took up their positions, the Perejaslavski division alone was missing, for they had smoked their pipes so strong that the smoke had brought them into misfortune. Some had been awakened to find themselves in the enemy's hands; others had never awakened more in this life, but were turned into grey earth as they slept. As to the ataman, he was recovering his senses in the enemy's stables, bereft of his trousers and upper garments.

The enemy's movements were heard in the town, the ramparts became crowded with soldiers, and a gay picture arose before

Taras Bulba

the Cossacks as the Polish chivalry, proud and handsome, rode on to the ramparts. Their metal helmets shone like suns and their plumes were white as the swan's neck. There were others, too, who wore bright caps of pink or blue, and long-sleeved mantles laced with gold and fastened with a cord of the same. Their weapons were of the best, richly inlaid and chased. In front of them all was the general who had relieved the town, wearing a scarlet cap trimmed with gold. Stern and tall he was, and so stout that his ample cloak barely covered him. Near the side gates was another general, a small, dried-up man, though his tiny eyes glinted from under their bushy brows like an eagle's, and it was easy to see, by the way he rode about and waved his thin hand, that he was an experienced soldier in spite of his small body. Near him stood a long, lanky ensign, with thick moustachios and a red

Taras Bulba

face, for he loved strong mead and good cheer. And many nobles stood behind them, some equipped at their own expense, others at the king's, others, again, at the Jews', having pledged all they could find in their ancestral castles. There were no few parasites, too, whom the senators took to dinner for their honour, and who stole the silver mugs off the tables and sideboards, and when the feasting was over, climbed on to another patron's coach and broke his horses in for him. All were there, even those who had not a ducat to bless themselves with, but had come to the wars all the same.

The Cossacks stood quietly under the walls. There was no gold about their dress, only a little glinted here and there on a sword hilt or culverin, for these knights never dressed richly for fighting. Their coats and armour were simple, and the black and red of their caps coloured

Taras Bulba

the field. Two Cossacks rode out from the ranks, one quite young and the other middle-aged. Both were glib of tongue, and no mean men in action either: their names were Ohrim Narsh and Mykita Golokopitenko. Close behind them rode Demid Popovitch, a thick-set Cossack, well known in Sietch. He had fought at Adrianople, and undergone many hardships in his time: had even been burned in a fire, and fled to Sietch with charred, black head, and his ears burned to a cinder. But he got over that; the hair behind the stumps of his ears grew long and thick, and his moustachios came again, as black as tar. He loved to have his little joke.

“Eh, eh!” he said, looking at the Polish army. “They’re showing their red caps now, I wonder if we’ll see their white feather before long.”

“I’ll have ye all hanged!” shouted the stout general from above. “Give up your

Taras Bulba

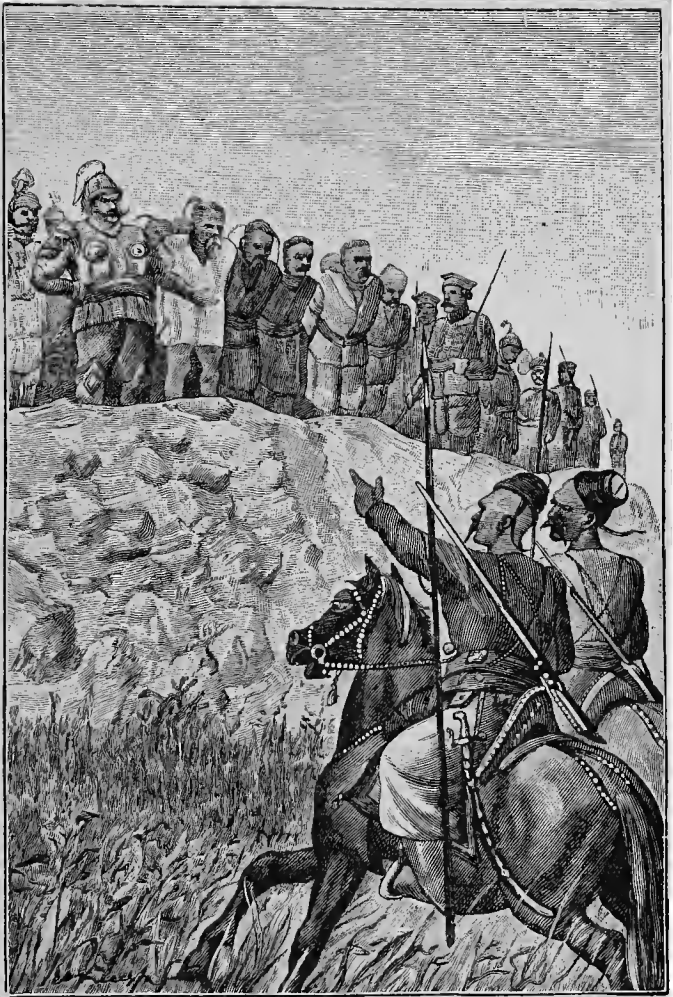
weapons and horses, ye caitiffs! Have ye seen how I took your men? Bring the prisoners out to the wall!”

And they brought out the Cossacks, who were bound with ropes. In front of them was their ataman, Hlib, without trousers or upper garments, just as they had taken him when drunk. Ashamed to have been caught like a dog whilst sleeping, he hung his head before his men; and his thick black hair had turned grey in that one night.

“Don’t worry, Hlib; we’ll turn them out yet!” cried the Cossacks from below.

“Don’t worry, my friend!” shouted Borodaty, an ataman. “’Tis no fault of thine that they took thee naked, but the shame is on them that they *show* thee naked, instead of giving thee a decent covering.”

“Methinks ye are a very valiant army when ye have to do with a lot of sleeping



“ ‘DON’T WORRY, MY FRIEND!’ SHOUTED BORODATY.”

Taras Bulba

men, remarked Golokopitenko, looking up to the rampart.

“For my part, I’d like to see them pull your hair for ye,” said Popovitch, riding near the walls. Then he turned to the Cossacks, “But who knows? maybe the Poles are right. Methinks they’ll have a right good shield if that old pot-belly up there leads them.”

“And why do ye think they’ll have a good shield?” asked some of the Cossacks, knowing Popovitch had a joke ready.

“Because he’s so big that the whole army can shelter behind it, and a devil’s son or two is sure to have a good thrust at ye from behind a belly like that.”

The Cossacks all laughed, and many shook their heads, saying, “Ay, ay, when Popovitch hath his joke he——”

But they did not finish, for—

“Away, away! get away from the wall!” shouted the commander, as the enraged

Taras Bulba

colonel waved his hand, and the Cossacks had barely time to take their chief's advice before the enemy's guns were discharged.

When the smoke cleared off, the grey Voevoda was alone on the rampart; the gates had opened and the army marched out. First rode the hussars on well-matched horses, then came men-at-arms and pikemen, then a regiment in copper helmets; after these, riding apart, the flower of the Polish nobility, each man dressed after his own taste, for these proud nobles would not mix with others, and those who had no command in the army rode to battle surrounded by their own retainers. Then followed a regiment on foot, an ensign bringing up the rear; then more pikemen, and behind these the stout general. Last of all rode the little thin general.

“Don't let them range themselves, don't let them keep order!” cried the Cossack commander. “Leave the other gates and

Taras Bulba

down upon them, all of ye, at once! The Diadkivski division to charge their right flank and the Titarevski their left! Kuku-benko and Palivoda to attack them from the rear! Scatter them, scatter them, all of ye!"

And the whole Cossack army fell upon the Poles, rushing in amongst them, scattering themselves and their opponents. Firing was out of the question, it was a matter of sword and pike. All fought in groups, and every man could show his mettle. Popovitch killed three men-at-arms and beat three nobles from their horses, saying, "These are good steeds; indeed I've longed for such horses many and many a time." And setting them off, he shouted to those near to catch them. This done he returned to his work, fell on some unhorsed nobles, killed one, lassoed the other, and fastening him to his saddle, dragged him over the field, not forgetting to take away his jewelled sword and wallet full of ducats.

Taras Bulba

Kobita, a young Cossack, and a good one, captured one of the bravest men in the Polish army, and had a long hand-to-hand struggle with him. The Cossack got the upper hand at last, pulled out his Turkish knife and dug it into his opponent's breast. But he did not escape either, for just then a hot bullet struck his head. A brave, handsome cavalier, son of a princely house, had fired the shot. He sat on his horse as straight as a riverside poplar. He had already cleft two Cossacks in halves, had brought down a third, together with his horse, dragging the rider from under it with his pike; he had wounded many another besides, and now he shot Kobita through the head.

"That's the man I'd like to have," thought Kukubenko, the ataman, rushing on him from the back with a yell that shook the ground. He tried to wheel round just in time to face the Pole, but his horse,

Taras Bulba

startled by the yell, plunged to one side and Kukubenko's fiery bullet lodged in the Pole's shoulders. The latter, though unhorsed, refused to surrender, and gathered all his strength for a last struggle; but his arm, weakened by the blow, fell useless by his side, and Kukubenko brought his broadsword straight on the whitening lips. It crashed through the teeth, which broke like sugar, split the tongue, and passing through the skull, pinned the cavalier to the grey earth for ever. The noble blood flowed out in a scarlet stream and stained the green tunic red, whilst Kukubenko rode off to join his men, who were fighting in another part of the field.

“What, he's left such a costly tunic on him!” exclaimed Ataman Borodaty, riding up to the spot where Kukubenko's victim lay. “I've slain seven nobles with my own hand, and not one of them was dressed like this.” Springing from his horse he began to strip

Taras Bulba

the corpse of its rich accoutrements. He pulled the jewelled Turkish knife from his belt, unfastened the wallet, that was full of ducats, took a silver talisman and the lock of cherished girlish hair off the dead man's bosom. So intent was he on his ghastly work that he did not hear the red-nosed ensign hurry up behind him. The ataman had unhorsed him once that day, and given him a few slashes besides. Now he revenged himself by bringing his sword down on the ataman's neck as he bent over the dead cavalier. The Cossack's trophies cost him his life; his powerful head fell off, and the trunk rolling on the ground, soddened the earth with blood. The stern Cossack soul sped to eternity, gloomy and indignant, and wondering perhaps that he had quitted that sturdy body so soon. But before the ensign had time to grasp the ataman's head and fasten it to his saddle, his avenger was at hand. Like the hawk that sweeps the

Taras Bulba

sky in wide circles and suddenly swoops down upon the wayside quail, so did young Ostap Bulba surprise the ensign and fling a noose round his neck. The red face grew purple as the noose tightened, and the ensign, grasping his pistol, made a last struggle for freedom, but his cramped arm aimed false and the shot fell harmlessly on the field. Then Ostap took the silken rope that the Poles kept by their saddle-bow for binding the prisoners, and tying the ensign to his saddle with his own means, dragged him far and wide over the field, shouting to the Umanski division that their ataman was slain.

As soon as the Umanskis heard their ataman was no more, they left the fight and hastened to recover his body; and whilst they paid it the last honours, they began to discuss as to whom they should make ataman. At last some of them said, "Why discuss the matter any longer? We cannot

Taras Bulba

choose a better ataman than young Ostap Bulba. True, he's younger than us all, but he hath the understanding of a much older man."

Ostap simply doffed his cap and thanked his comrades for the honour, without mention of his youth or understanding, knowing full well that the present time was not for speech-making but for fighting, and ordered his men in a way that showed them all they had not chosen him ataman for nothing.

Meanwhile, the enemy, feeling matters were going badly with them, had retired to the farther end of the field. The little colonel signalled to the reserve forces who had been waiting by the gates, and the Polish cannon opened upon the Cossacks. But very few of them were hit, for the best part of the discharge fell amongst the drove of oxen that had been standing and watching the fight with wild, frightened eyes. The maddened brutes rushed towards the baggage-train, crashing amongst the wag-

Taras Bulba

gons and trampling on the Cossacks; but Taras fell upon the drove from his ambuscade and chased the terrified, bellowing herd right on to the enemy's ranks, where they trampled men and horses under them.

“We thank ye, we thank ye, good oxen!” cried the Cossacks. “Not only have ye brought our baggage here, but now ye help us to fight,” and returning to the attack with redoubled strength they made gaps in the enemy's wavering lines, till the latter, seeing the tide of battle had turned against them, signalled to their friends to let them into the town. The creaking gates swung open and the weary army flocked in like dusty sheep. Some of the Cossacks were for following them, but Ostap kept his men back, shouting, “From the walls, from the walls. 'Tis dangerous to go near them.” And he was right, for the enemy's cannon opened on them, and nearly all who were under the walls were hit.

Taras Bulba

Then the head ataman rode up to praise Ostap.

“Here’s a young ataman,” he said; “but he leadeth his men with the wisdom of an old one.”

Turning round to see who the new ataman was, old Taras espied his son at the head of the Umanskis, with his cap turned up at one side and the ataman’s staff in his hand.

“Aha! That’s it, is it,” he muttered contentedly, and thanked the division for the honour they had paid his son.

Before the Cossacks gained their camp the Poles appeared on the ramparts; but now their rich mantles were tattered, the blood dripped from their costly tunics, and their helmets were covered with dust.

“Well! and have ye caught us?” cried the Cossacks from below.

“This is what I’ll give ye!” roared the stout general, shaking a rope, whilst the

Taras Bulba

tired, dusty army began to swear and threaten.

But at last, wearied with the battle, all retired; some to sleep, others to sprinkle mould on their wounds and bind them with costly stuff looted from the Poles; others again, and these were of the freshest, to collect the dead and pay them the last earthly tributes. They dug graves with the pikes and broadswords, brought fresh earth from the steppes, and reverently covered the Cossack corpses therewith, lest the eagles and other birds of prey should peck out the sleepers' eyes. But the Poles' bodies they lashed together and tied them to the tails of wild horses, which they lashed and whipped till the maddened brutes bolted over hillock and furrow, ditch and stream, dragging the battered, gory corpses behind them. Then the Cossacks sat in groups, and passed the evening talking of the campaigns and battles that fall to the lot of every man. Long they

Taras Bulba

sat, and long sat Taras Bulba, pondering over Andrew and his absence from the fray that day. Had Judas shrunk from fighting against his own, or had the Jew lied and the boy been taken captive! When he thought how easily Andrew was influenced by women, the old man tingled with shame and cursed the Voevoda's daughter who had bewitched him. Right well would he have fulfilled his curse, dragged her by her long, thick plait round the Cossack camp, for all her beauty, beating her against the ground till her snow-white limbs and breast were covered with dust and gore; yea, he would have torn the beautiful body limb from limb. But old Taras knew not what God had prepared for the morrow, and finally fell asleep. And the Cossacks talked on, and the sentries stood by the fires, watching every dark corner with sober, wakeful eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE sun had scarcely risen in the sky when the Cossacks gathered together once more, for news had come from Sietch that the Tartars had razed the town, found the hidden treasure, captured all the knights

Taras Bulba

who had stayed behind, and taking prisoners, treasure, and cattle, started for Perekop. But one Cossack, Maxim Goloduha by name, managed to escape on the way. He killed the Mirza, took the bag of sequins that hung at his belt, and mounted on a Tartar horse and disguised in Tartar clothes, escaped from his pursuers during two whole days and nights; rode his horse to death, mounted another one, and hearing that the Cossack army was at Dubno, reached the camp on the third day. He only told them of the trouble; how it came about, whether the men of Sietch had been merry-making, and Cossack-like, fallen drunk into the Tartars' hands, how the treasure had been discovered, he did not say. Swollen and exhausted, his face burned by sun and wind, he dropped on to the ground and instantly fell fast asleep.

As a rule the army lost no time in pursuing the Tartars, but always strove to

Taras Bulba

overtake them on the road, for once they had sent their prisoners to the slave-markets in Asia Minor, Smyrna, and Crete, God only knew where a Cossack's forelock might be found. This is the question they had met together to decide. Now, all stood with covered heads, for they had come to take counsel as equals, and not to listen to their commander's order.

"Give the seniors the first word," shouted some. "Let the commander speak first," said others. And the commander, no longer an ataman, but a comrade, doffed his cap, and thanking the Cossacks for the honour, began his speech.

"There are many older and wiser men among ye, but as ye have honoured me thus I'll give ye my advice, which is, comrades, to waste no time, but to march after the Tartars without delay, because they won't sit down on the road with the treasure and wait till we come up to them; nay, they'll

Taras Bulba

make such good use of their legs that they won't leave as much as a footmark behind them. We've been playing about here long enough. These Poles know now what a Cossack is made of. We've avenged our Faith, and as for plunder, there's not much to be got out of a starving town. My advice, therefore, is to go!"

"To go!" shouted the crowd.

But these words did not please old Taras Bulba; far from it. His heavy brows, touched with white as the mountain shrubs are sprinkled with icicles in winter, frowned, and he said—

"No, your advice is not good! Ye have no right to talk like that. Ye have forgot, methinks, that our comrades too are here, here in Polish hands. Methinks ye would have us forget the most sacred law, and leave our comrades here to be flayed alive or hacked in pieces, and sent to all the fairs and markets in the Ukraine, as hath already

Taras Bulba

befallen our hetman and the flower of Russian knighthood. Have they not desecrated our Paschal food enough? What manner of men are we, I ask ye? What manner of Cossack is he who deserts his comrade in the hour of trouble and leaves them to perish amongst strangers like a dog? If Cossack honour be held so cheap that our foes may spit on its beard and load it with abuse, I for one will have none of it! My mind is made up! I'll stay here alone!"

When Taras finished speaking there was a stir amongst the crowd of warriors.

"And hast thou forgotten, brave colonel," retorted the commander, "that there are comrades of ours in the Tartars' hands as well; that unless we save them their life will be spent in bondage amongst the heathen, a bondage that is worse than the worst death? Hast thou forgotten that our treasure, bought with Christian blood, is also in their hands?"

Taras Bulba

The Cossacks, anxious to keep their honour untarnished, stood silent and undecided. Then Kasian Bovdug, the eldest man in the whole army, stepped forward. He was much respected by the Cossacks, twice elected commander, and had been a good fighter in his time. But he had grown too old for harness long ago, never gave advice to anybody, and loved to lie on his side amongst the Cossacks, listening to their tales of war and adventure, which he never interrupted or remarked upon, but lay smoking the short pipe which was never out of his mouth, and blinking his eyes till the Cossacks did not know whether he was asleep or listening. He generally stayed at home when the army went to the wars, but this time he had waved his hand in Cossack fashion, saying—

“Well, I’ll go too. Maybe I’ll be some use to Cossackdom.”

All the Cossacks were silent when he

Taras Bulba

stepped forward, for it was a long time since anybody had heard him speak, and everybody was eager to have his opinion.

“The time hath come, brother-gentlemen, for me to say a word,” he began, “so listen to an old man, my children. The commander hath spoken wisely. As head of the army he is bound to chase the army and get our treasure back. He could have said nothing wiser. Lo! that is my first word; and my second word saith—this is what my second word saith: Colonel Taras also hath spoken well. May God give him long years and us many more colonels like him. The first duty and first honour of a Cossack is to stand by his comrades. As long as I have lived I have never heard, brother-gentlemen, of a Cossack forsaking or betraying his comrades. And they are all our comrades, some nearer and others less near, but our comrades none the less, and all of them dear to us. Lo! this is my

Taras Bulba

advice: to those who want to go after the Tartars, let them go after the Tartars; to those who want to stay here and fight the Poles, let them stay here and fight the Poles. Let the commander do his duty and lead one part against the Tartars, and let the second part choose an ataman for the time being. And for such an ataman, if ye will but listen to a white head, ye can't choose a better than Taras Bulba, for there's not his equal in valour amongst us."

So spoke Bovdug and was silent; and the Cossacks were pleased with the old man's wisdom. All threw up their caps, saying—

"Thank ye, Batka! He was silent and silent; yea, he was long silent, but at last he hath spoken. Not in vain didst ye promise to serve Cossackdom, for ye have served it."

"Well, and do ye all agree to that?" asked the commander.

Taras Bulba

“We all do agree,” answered the Cossacks.

“Then the council is over?”

“The council is over.”

“Then, now hark ye to military orders, my children,” said the commander, putting on his hat and stepping forward. And the Cossacks to a man doffed their caps and stood with bared heads and downcast eyes, as was the Cossack custom when a senior spoke. “Now divide, brother-gentlemen,” said the commander. “He who wants to go must step to the right, he who will stay to the left, and the ataman must go there where the greater part of his division is, and the rest of his division must join another one.”

And they began to divide, some stepping to the right and others to the left, and the ataman stayed with the greater part of his division, whilst the smaller part joined another division; but the two sides were almost equal. Those who stayed were:

Taras Bulba

almost all the Nezamaikovski division, the greater part of the Popovitch division, all the Umanski and Kanevski divisions, most of the Sreblivoski division, the larger part of the Timoszevski division. The rest preferred to chase the Tartars, but there were many good and trusty Cossacks on both sides. Amongst those who had made up their minds to go after the Tartars were Czerevatı, a good old Cossack, Lemish and Prokopitch; Demid Popovitch, too, determined to go because he was a restless Cossack and could never stay long anywhere, and having tried his luck with the Poles, was anxious to see what he could do with the Tartars. The atamen were: Nostugan, Nokpishka, Nevilitchki, and many other brave and trusty Cossacks, who thirsted to try their swords on the Tartars' backs. And there were no few very good Cossacks amongst those who stayed behind: Ataman Demitrovitch,

Taras Bulba

Kukubenko, Vertihvist, Balaban, and young Ostap Bulba; but there were many other famous Cossacks among them. All were seasoned to campaigns and arms, knew the Levant, the Crimean steppes and salt marshes, all the rivers, broad and narrow, which flow into the Dnieper, as well as the islands and fords thereof. They had been in Moldavia, Vallachia and Turkey; had cruised in the Black Sea, in their Cossack "seagulls," had fallen with a fleet of fifty canoes on to the richest and strongest galley, sinking more than one Turkish ship and shooting much, much powder in their time. More than once had they torn up rich silks and velvets for leg-binders; more than once had they worn belts of sequins; and it were bootless to try and count how many of them had spent enough in drinking and feasting to keep other men in comfort for the rest of their days. All their plunder had been squandered in true Cossack fashion,

Taras Bulba

in treating their comrades to feast and music, so that all might pass the time as pleasantly as possible. And some of them still had a little treasure, such as a few silver tankards, ladles and armlets, hidden somewhere under the reeds that grow on the Dnieper islands, lest the Tartars fell upon Sietch ; and indeed the Tartar would have had hard work to find it, for the owner himself had long since forgotten where it lay. Such were the Cossacks who wanted to stay behind to avenge their comrades and the Christian faith. Old Bovdug, too, determined to stay, remarking—

“ Hunting the Tartar is no work for me, and this is just the place for a good Cossack to end his life. 'Tis long since I prayed God that when the time comes for me to die, it may be in battle for the Faith and for Christian work. So hath it come about. There can be no better end for an old Cossack anywhere.”

Taras Bulba

When they had all chosen sides and stood in two rows, the commander walked between them, asking—

“And what, brethren, are ye all satisfied?”

“All satisfied, Batka,” the Cossacks answered.

“Well, then, kiss one another and wish each other God-speed, for He alone knoweth if ye shall ever meet again. Obey your ataman, and do ye do that which your hearts command ye, for ye all know what Cossack honour exacteth.”

All the Cossacks, as many as there were, kissed one another. The atamen began; brushing their grey moustachios away from their mouths, they kissed, and grasping each other's hands, held them in a long clasp. And they fain would have asked one another, “What, brother, shall we or shall we not meet again?” But they did not, for both grey heads guessed the truth. And the other Cossacks bade one another

Taras Bulba

God-speed, knowing there was plenty of hard work in store for them all. But they decided not to part until it was dark, lest the enemy should see that their numbers had decreased. Then they went to the camp for dinner. After dinner all that were to march lay down and slept the long, deep sleep of those that feel their next slumber might cause them to regret such freedom; and they slept till sundown. When the sun had quite sunk and it was growing dusk, they began to grease the waggons. When they were fully equipped, they sent the baggage-train on in front, and waving their caps to their comrades, went silently away. The cavalry and foot went quietly after the baggage-train without shout or whistle, and all were soon lost in the darkness. Nothing was to be heard but the dull thud of the horses' hoofs, or the creak of a wheel that had been badly tarred in the darkness. Those left behind stood a

Taras Bulba

long time and waved their arms, though they could see nothing; but when they returned to the camp, where the light of the stars showed them that half of the waggons had gone, and many, many familiar faces were missing, they grew thoughtful, their hearts involuntarily saddened, and their jolly heads drooped. Taras saw how mournful his men were, and how despair, so unfitting a brave man, began to envelop their hearts; but he said nothing, for he wanted them to get used to the sorrow they felt at parting from their comrades. Meanwhile, he determined to arouse them all with the old Cossack war-cry, that stronger and greater courage might fill their hearts. For the broad and powerful Slavonic race excels others as the sea excels the smooth rivers. When the tempest rages, tossing and roaring like thunder, it raises its waves like ramparts, as the weak rivers cannot do; but when the weather is calm and quiet, its mirror-like surface smiles

Taras Bulba

brighter and more placid than the clearest stream.

Taras told his servants to unpack a waggon with stout, double-hooped wheels, the largest and strongest in the baggage-train, which stood somewhat apart from the others. It was heavily laden, covered with ox-hides and horse-clothes, bound with strong, tarred ropes, and packed with casks and barrels of good old wine that had lain in Bulba's cellar for many a long year. He had brought it to the wars to be drunk only at some great moment when work worthy of lasting fame was at hand, so that all the knights might meet the occasion with old wine and good cheer. The servants ran to fulfil their master's orders, cut the ropes with their swords, pulled out the hides and horse-clothes, and took out the flasks and kegs.

“Take it all out,” cried Bulba. “Take it all out, leave nothing in, and do ye all of

Taras Bulba

ye take whatever vessel ye have, such as tankard, or horse-bucket, or gauntlet, or cap, or if ye have none of these do ye put the palms of your hands together.”

All the Cossacks took what they had—tankard, gauntlet, or cap; and if they had none of these, they joined the palms of their hands together. And Taras Bulba's servants went down the rows and filled all the vessels with wine from the kegs and flasks, and Taras did not sign for them to drink till they were all ready. He had evidently something to say. He knew full well that good old wine is enough in itself to strengthen a man's heart, but if a few reasonable words be joined thereto, the strength and the wine and the heart will be the better for it.

“I am not regaling ye, brethren,” so said Taras, “because ye have made me ataman, great though the honour ye have paid me is; nor because of our absent comrades. Both

Taras Bulba

are worthy of it, but not now. The minute before us is of other import, and the work before us calleth for much sweat and for much Cossack valour; therefore, brethren, we will drink together to the Holy Orthodox Church, that the time may come at last for her to reign everywhere, and for Mussulmans to turn Christians. Yea, and we will drink once more to Sietch, that she may live long; to the discomfort of Mahometism, that she may give us yearly young men that shall ever be braver and handsomer than the last. Yea, and we will drink to our common glory, that your grandsons and grandsons' sons may tell of those who were not ashamed of their comrades nor leave them to perish. To the Church, brethren, to the Church!"

"To the Church!" thundered those who stood near. "To the Church!" echoed the back ranks; and all there, old and young, drank to the Church.



“TO THE CHURCH, BRETHREN, TO THE CHURCH!”

Taras Bulba

“To Sietch!” cried Taras, and held his hand high above his head.

“To Sietch!” loudly repeated the first rows. “To Sietch!” repeated the old men under their grey moustachios. “To Sietch!” piped the young ones like a nestful of young hawks; and the sound of the Cossacks’ voices shook the steppe.

“Now for the last gulp, comrades,” cried Bulba. “To the glory of all Christians that live upon the earth!”

All the Cossacks drank the last drop to the glory of all the Christians upon earth, and long the shout rang through the Cossack ranks.

The vessels were empty, but still the Cossacks stood with uplifted arms, and though their eyes glittered from the wine, their hearts pondered. But no longer of the gain and pillage of war, nor of the loot of ducats, rich arms, Circassian horses and plunder, pondered they. Like the eagles

Taras Bulba

that perch on the craggy mountain-tops and gaze on the distant, boundless sea, where the galleys are as birds, and the coast-line is sprinkled with towns like midges and forests like grass, they gazed upon the steppe as on their own dim, unknown fate. The field will be strewn far and wide with their scattered, whitening bones, and sprinkled with their blood; far and wide the waggons, hacked by pike and sword, will lumber the ground; far and wide their heads, with thick-matted hair, will lie a prey to vultures that swoop over the plain and peck out their eyes.

But that vast, ghastly bivouac will not be in vain, for not one brave deed will be lost, not one Cossack fall to the earth as the powder falleth from a gun-barrel. The minstrel, with the grey head full of manly fire, but grey none the less, will be there, and he will tell of those deeds in bold, powerful words. The fame of them will be noised all over the world, and those yet unknown

Taras Bulba

will speak of it; for strong words fly far, like the clanging of a metal bell that the master hath encased in much silver, that its music may be carried over hut and hamlet, palace and town, calling all to prayer.

CHAPTER IX.



NOBODY in the town knew that half the Cossacks had set out in pursuit of the Tartars. Thesentries

noticed from the tower that part of the baggage-train had been removed beyond the forest, but they thought the Cossacks were preparing an ambushade, and the French engineer was of the same opinion. Meanwhile, the commander's prophecy had come true and the town was again short

Taras Bulba

of food, for the relieving forces had brought but few provisions with them, after the custom of the day.

A sortie had been made, but one half of it had been shot down by the Cossacks, and the other half driven empty-handed back to the town. But the Jews at least had taken advantage of the sortie, and heard all the news; so it was not long before Dubno knew where and why the Cossacks had marched, what leader they had taken, and what divisions; how many were left behind, and what their plans were. After holding a hurried council of war, the Polish generals determined to attack the enemy.

Seeing the stir and bustle, Taras Bulba guessed what was afoot, and began his preparations without delay. He ordered three divisions to barricade themselves with waggons, a stratagem often employed by the Cossacks. Three more formed an ambuscade; whilst he ordered part of the

Taras Bulba

field to be sown with broken cart-wheels, spears, pikes, and guns, intending to drive the enemy there if possible. When all was ready, he made the Cossacks a speech—not to stir up or refreshen them, for he knew their hearts were brave and stout without that, but because he wanted to tell them all that was on his heart.

“I want to tell ye, gentlemen,” he began, “what manner of thing our comradeship is. Ye have heard from our fathers and grand-fathers what honour our land was held in by all people; even the Greeks knew of her, and she took tribute from Constantinople; and her towns and churches were splendid; and her princes, her own princes were of the race of Rus, and no Roman heretics. But the Mussulman took it all and it fell. And only we grey old men are left, yea, and like the widow of a mighty husband, our land is a prey, as we are. Such were the days, comrades, in which we joined hands

Taras Bulba

in brotherhood! This is what our comradeship standeth upon! And there is no comradeship more sacred. A father loveth his children, children love their father and mother; but it is not that, brethren. Even a wild beast loveth its young; but kinship of the heart and not of blood only a man can make. Other lands, too, have their comrades, but there have been none like the comrades of the Russian soil. Many of ye have chanced to go into foreign lands, and there were people there too, God's men too, and ye talked with them as with your own. But when it came to speaking from the heart, ye had no words. And yet they were wise people, people even as ye are. But who can love as the Russian heart loveth, brethren? for ye love not with your mind, or one other part, but with all that God hath given ye, with all your heart and soul. Ah!" cried Taras, waving his hands, tossing his grey head and brushing away his grey

Taras Bulba

moustachios, "ah! no one else can love like that! I know that evil hath taken hold on the land, that there are those amongst ye who think but of getting corn-ricks and hay-ricks, yea, droves of horses, yea, that their cellars may be choked with honey. They have God knows what Mussulman ideas; they despise their own tongue, and will not speak with their own kin, and sell their own as soulless food is sold in the market-place. Love for a foreign king—nay, not even a foreign king, but for a scurvy Polish magnate, who beateth them about the face with his boot—is dearer to them than all brotherhood. But even the worst wretch amongst them, no matter who he may be, no matter how deep sunken in fawning and luxury, hath a crumb of Russian feeling, and one day they will awake and smite their breasts and dash their head against the ground, loudly cursing their miserable life, prepared to redeem their shameful deeds

Taras Bulba

with tortures. Yea, let all men know what comradeship meaneth on Russian soil! And when the time comes for one of them to die, not one of them could die like we, not one! Not one! their feeble natures could not grasp it."

So said the ataman, and when he ceased, his head, silvered in Cossack deeds, was held high. All that stood by him were moved when they heard these words, which had gone straight to their hearts. The old men stood with bent heads and sternly brushed away the tears that gathered silently in their old eyes. Then all waved their hands as if by a given signal, and raised their gallant heads. Old Taras well knew how to stir up all that is best and bravest in the hearts of these men, grown wise in the trials and hardships of life; the young hearts, too, were glad to think of the fame of their forefathers and of the fathers who had begotten them.

Taras Bulba

And the enemy had already left the town, with the roll of their drums and the blare of their trumpets, and the nobles rode out surrounded by their retainers. The stout colonel gave the word of command, and with flashing eyes and shimmering arms they dashed on the Cossack barricade and fired in their faces.

As soon as the Cossacks saw it was a matter of firearms, they grasped their short hand-guns and kept up a steady fire till the sound of the shooting went over many a field and meadow, the air was filled with the roar thereof, and the battlefield hidden in smoke. The Cossacks kept up a perpetual fire, for those behind loaded for those in front, and the enemy was astonished at the steady defence. The smoke was too dense for the Poles to see the guns pass from hand to hand, from back to front, but they felt how thick the hail of the bullets was and how fierce the struggle had grown, and when

Taras Bulba

they drew back a little to escape from the smoke and look around them, they saw many a gap in their ranks, though the Cossacks' losses were light. The latter kept up their firing till even the foreign engineer whom the Poles had brought with them was astonished at them, and shouted—"Those are the right sort of soldiers. That's the way to fight!" and advised the Poles to bring up their guns. The cannon roared with their iron throats shaking the ground far around them and making the air thicker than ever with their smoke, whilst the smell of the powder filled many a town and hamlet. The gunners had aimed too high; the discharge shot into the air with fearful force, but rushed over the Cossacks' heads and sunk into the ground far behind them, tearing up the earth as it fell. The French engineer tore his hair when he saw such want of skill, and began to load the cannon himself, notwithstanding the heavy fire that

Taras Bulba

still poured out from the Cossack barricade. Taras saw it would go ill with the men behind the waggons, and shouted to them to leave them and mount their horses with all speed ; but few would have had time to do it had not Ostap Bulba ridden up to the enemy and struck the wicks from the hands of six of the gunners. The Poles drove him back before he could reach the other two, and the French engineer took the wick and fired the biggest gun the Cossacks had ever seen. Its wide jaws grinned horridly, and a thousand deaths looked out from them. When its roar was followed by the three smaller ones, an earthquake shook the field, and much bitterness belched forth. More than one old mother will mourn her Cossack son, beating her breast with bony hands ; more than one wife will be widowed in the Ukraine ; the women will rush tearfully through the bazaars, stopping the strangers and looking in their faces to see if he,

Taras Bulba

dearer than all, be not amongst them ; many warriors will pass the town, but he who is dearer than all will be missing.

It was as though the Nezamajski division were not ; as the hail lays low the field that rustled with rich yellow corn a moment before, so were they torn off and struck down. How the red-topped caps were strewn on the ground ! how their ataman raged when he saw that the best part of his men was gone ! He was fighting at the time amidst a handful of Cossacks, and when he saw what had been done, he beat down all the Poles within his reach, like as many cabbage-heads, cutting his way through men and horses till he reached the guns. It was not long before two of them fell into his hands, but when he saw that the Umanski's ataman was at work there, and that Stephen Guzka had captured the largest, he lead the remnant of his division to another part of the field. Where they found a Pole they left a

Taras Bulba

corpse, for they mowed them down like corn. So it was by the Voutuzenko waggons, and beside the Czerebitenko and Degtjarenko waggons, with the ataman behind them. Degtjarenko had speared two nobles and fallen on an obstinate third. Strong and valiant was the Pole, dressed in fine clothes and surrounded by his retainers. He chased the Cossack, threw him to the ground, and waving his sword over him, shouted—

“Will not one of you Cossack dogs dare to match himself with me?”

“Ay, and here is he!” cried Shilo, coming forward.

He was a muscular knight, had been ataman in more than one sea raid, and had passed through many dangers and privations. He and some comrades were captured in Trebizond and taken as slaves to the Turkish galleys. Their arms and legs were bound with chains, and they were given nothing but salt-water for many days. All

Taras Bulba

except Shilo preferred to suffer these tortures rather than renounce the Orthodox creed; but he could not endure till the end, and trampling the sacred laws under foot, wound a green turban round his sinful head, and gained the pasha's confidence. They made him armourer on the galley, and put him over all his comrades. This saddened the unhappy slaves, for they knew well that when one of them turned heathen and was put over his fellows it was harder to be in his hands than in any pagan's. And so it was: Shilo bound them together by threes with iron chains, thrashed them to the bone, beat their faces, and shaved the backs of their heads. But when the Turks, glad to have such a servant, began to make merry and break their laws by getting drunk, he brought his four-and-sixty keys and gave one to each of the slaves, who immediately loosened their shackles, cast them into the sea, and seizing all the weapons that were

Taras Bulba

within reach, beat their Turkish masters. They got much booty on that occasion, and returned home covered with glory, and the minstrels sang of Shilo's prowess. He would have been made commander of all the army, but he was a queer Cossack. One day he would do things that the wisest man was incapable of, and the next the very demon of folly would possess him. As he drank much, he soon squandered all the booty he had brought to Sietch, and when it was all gone began to pilfer his comrade's, stealing the Cossacks' clothes at night and pledging them in the Jewish pothouses. For such foul work they tied him to a post in the bazaar and put a club by him, so that every passer-by could hit him; but not one Cossack would raise his hand against him because of his past services. Such was Shilo, who took up the Pole's challenge, crying—

“Here is one who will fight with thee, thou dog!”

Taras Bulba

They hacked at one another till their corselets and armpieces were covered with dents; at last the Pole struck Shilo's iron shirt with a force that drove the blade through it and stained the corselet red. But Shilo heeded not his wound, and raising his brawny hand—it was a heavy one—brought it down upon the head of the Pole, who was silenced for ever.

(“Tarry not to plunder, Shilo! 'Twere better to turn back!”)

But he did not turn back, and one of the dead man's retainers cut his neck in two. Wheeling round, Shilo was about to grasp his opponent, when he saw a puff of smoke, and he was fired upon from all sides. He fell, and putting his hands to the wound, turned to his comrades, saying—

“Farewell, brethren! farewell, comrades! May Orthodox Russia live for ever, and be held in honour for ever!”

His dimmed eyes grew stiff, and his

Taras Bulba

Cossack soul fled from the stalwart body, and the Cossacks rejoined their men.

“Well, gentlemen,” shouted Taras, riding up to his men, “is there any powder left in the powder-flask? Hath Cossack strength not waned? Can the Cossacks still hold their own?”

“There is still powder in the powder-flask, Batka! Cossack strength hath not weakened, the Cossacks can still hold their own!” answered his men.

And closing up, they charged the enemy with redoubled vigour. The little colonel beat up his troops, and ordered banners to be waved to summon the men who were scattered all over the field to their regiments; but before he could collect them, Ataman Kukubenko charged his centre and fell straight on to the pot-bellied colonel, who turned and fled; but Kukubenko chased him all over the field, taking good care he could not reach his men.

Taras Bulba

When Stephen Gurka saw this, he rode up, lasso in hand, and keeping his head low on his horse's neck, aimed so well that the rope tightened round the colonel at once. With purple face, he strove to loosen the cord, but a pike hit him in the stomach and pinned him to the ground. However, Gurka did not escape either, and the Cossacks were just in time to see him raised up on a pike's point. The unfortunate knight just shouted, "May all our foes perish, and Russia live for ever!" and gave up the ghost.

His Cossacks turned away to see Metelitsa belabouring some Poles, hitting one in the ribs and another on the head; Ataman Nevilitchki was struggling with another group; whilst the enemy had boarded the Zakrutigub waggons and beaten them on their own ground, though Pisarenko beat off a whole company from his; and whilst others were fighting and struggling in the very carts.

"What, gentlemen!" shouted Taras, riding

Taras Bulba

up in front of them all, "is there still powder left in the powder-flask? Is there still Cossack strength? Are the Cossacks still holding their own?"

"There is still powder in the powder-flasks, Batka! Cossack strength is still strong! The Cossacks still hold their own!" was the answer.

And now Bovdug has fallen from his waggon, for a bullet struck his heart. Gathering up all his strength, the old man cried—

"It is no sorrow to leave life. May God give every one such an end as this!"

And his soul was carried to eternity, to tell others long since departed how well they fight on Russian soil, and better still how well they die there, for the Faith's sake. Balaban, a divisional ataman, soon followed him. He got three mortal wounds from pike, ball, and sword. He was one of the most famous of all the Cossacks, having

Taras Bulba

seen much fighting as ataman of sea raids; but most famous of all was his expedition to the Levant. They had got many sequins and rich Turkish clothing, but trouble overtook them on the homeward voyage, for they fell in with some Turkish boats which capsized all their canoes, and swamped half of them, though the rushes that were fastened to their sides saved them from drowning. Balaban rowed away as hard as he could, stood under the sun, so that the Turks could not see him, and as soon as night fell, had the canoes baled out. They mended the holes as well as they could, tore up their wide trousers for sails, and rigging them up, outran the Turks. Not only did they arrive safely in Sietch, but brought golden ornaments for the Kiev monastery, as well as image-trimmings of pure silver. Long the minstrels sang of Balaban's feats. Now, feeling his wounds were mortal, he bowed his head and said quietly—

Taras Bulba

“Methinks, brethren, I am dying a right good death. I have cut down seven, piked nine, unhorsed a goodly number; how many got my bullets I know not. May the soil of Russia flourish!” and the spirit left him.

Cossacks, Cossacks, don't give up the flower of your chivalry! Kukubenko is outnumbered, only seven of all the Nezamajskis are left; even they are truly pressed and their armour stained with blood! Seeing their plight, Taras set out to join them; but too late. The Polish pikes pierced their hearts before he could rescue them, and the young blood was spilled like the dear wine that the careless servant takes in glass vessels from the cellar, and stumbling on the threshold breaks the precious bottles. The wine runs over the floor and the master tears his hair, for he had stored it during his lifetime in the hope that when he met some friend of his youth they might

Taras Bulba

talk together of the days when a man made merry in a better way.

Kukubenko looked round him and said—

“Thank God, comrades, that it hath been given to me to die before your eyes. May better ones than we follow us, and ever adorn Russian soil, beloved of Christ!”

And his young soul fled, the angels bearing it upon their wings. It will be well with him there in heaven. “Sit ye down on my right hand,” the Master will say; “thou hast not changed thy comradeship, nor done any dishonourable thing, nor left a man in his distress. My Church, too, hast thou protected and preserved.”

Kukubenko's death saddened everybody. The Cossack ranks were sorely rent; many, many brave ones were missing; but the rest still stood firm.

“And what, gentlemen,” asked Taras of the little remnant, “have ye still powder in your powder-flasks? Is there still Cossack

Taras Bulba

strength? Can the Cossacks still stand firm?"

"There is still powder enough, Batka. The swords can still do something. Cossack strength hath not waned, nor all the Cossacks fallen."

And once more they charged as they had never charged before. Only three atamen were left; a red river flowed over the field, and the bridges of the dead Cossacks and Poles stood high. Looking skywards, Taras saw a flock of gerfalcon. They had on what to thrive.

Metelitsa had been taken up on a pike; the second Pisarenko rolled over and closed his eyes for ever; Ohrim Guska lay upon the ground cut in four pieces. "Now," thought Taras, and waved his kerchief. Ostap understood the signal, and rushing from his ambushade, charged the enemy's horse. The Poles were unable to resist the bold attack, and he chased them straight

Taras Bulba

on to that part of the field where the ground was struck with broken pikes and other rubbish. The horses stumbled and threw their riders over their heads. Then the Cossacks by the waggons, seeing it was the time to fire, let off their guns and threw the Poles into worse confusion, shooting the greater part of them. The Cossacks' hearts grew lighter, and they shouted—

“There is an end to ye now!” and hoisted the flag of victory, whilst the discomfited Poles made off as best they could.

“Nay, we've not got the victory yet,” said old Taras, glancing towards the town.

And he spoke the truth, for just then the gates were opened and a regiment of hussars, the flower of the Polish cavalry, rushed out. Their chestnut chargers matched in size and shade, and at their head rode a cavalier, braver and handsomer than all. The long black hair flowed from beneath his casque, and the rich scarf

Taras Bulba

round his arm had been sewn by the fairest of women. Taras nearly lost his senses when he saw that it was Andrew. Covered with the dust and heat of battle, eager to deserve the scarf about his arm, he rides on like some young hound, swifter and slimmer than all the leash. When the huntsman blows his horn he advances, legs outstretched and body sideways, scatters the snow as he goes, and outruns the hare in his swiftness.

As old Taras stood and watched how he cleared the road, chasing, killing, striking to right and left, he could not contain himself, and shouted out—

“What! thine own people? Thine own people, devil’s son; thou fightest against thine own?”

But Andrew did not see who was before him. Tresses, tresses, saw he—long, long tresses, and a breast like the river swan’s, and a snowy cheek and shoulders, and

Taras Bulba

all, all that was made for a passionate caress.

“Eh, lads, do ye but lure him into yonder forest for me!” cried Taras; and thirty of the swiftest Cossacks, pressing their caps on to their heads, galloped to obey him. They charged straight at the hussars, killing a few of their flank, and sending the rear flying, whilst Golokopitenko brought down his sword on Andrew’s back. How the boy’s heart beat! How the young blood rushed through his veins as he spurred his horse and chased the Cossacks without a look behind him, little dreaming that only twelve men were following!

The Cossacks soon reached the forest, but Andrew’s horse outran them, and he was neck to neck with Golokopitenko, when he felt a sharp pull at his bridle. Looking round, he saw Taras before him. The lad turned pale, and his body shook like a leaf
If a schoolboy has quarrelled with one of

Taras Bulba

his fellows, and having chased him, is ready to deal him a blow, when he feels the master's eye upon him all his childish anger dies out. So it was with Andrew. His passion died out as though it had never been, and all he saw before him now was his stern, terrible father.

“Well, and what shall we do now?” asked Taras, looking straight in his son's eyes.

But Andrew sat still, his eyes on his horse's mane, and answered nothing.

“What, sonnie, and have the Poles helped thee?” continued Taras.

But Andrew was silent.

“To do this thing, to sell thy Faith, to sell thy comrades! Wait! Get down from thy horse.”

Andrew obeyed, and neither dead nor alive, stood before his father.

“Stand still and do not flinch! I begot thee, and I will kill thee!” said Taras; and

Taras Bulba

stepping back a few steps, he took the gun from his shoulders.

Andrew's face was white as death; his lips moved as he uttered somebody's name. It was not the name of his country or mother or brother, but that of a fair Polish woman. Taras fired. Like an ear of corn that is cut down by the sickle, like a young snipe that feels the deadly steel at his heart, his head drooped, and he fell to the ground without a word. Long the father gazed at the body of the son he had murdered. He was handsome even in death. His manly face, so short a time since full of strength and charm, was still strangely beautiful; the black brows shaded the features like funeral drapery.

“What a Cossack he might have been!” thought Taras. “And tall of stature and black-browed, and a noble face and a hand strong in battle; and he hath perished, like some miserable hound he hath perished!”

Taras Bulba

“Batka, Batka! what have ye done? 'Tis ye that have killed him!” cried Ostap, riding up.

Taras nodded. As Ostap looked earnestly at the dead face he was full of sorrow for his brother.

“Let us bury him decently, Batka, lest the Poles trample on him or the birds tear his body,” he said at last.

“Eh, they'll bury him without us,” growled Bulba. “They'll be mourners and comforters too.”

And he was wondering whether he should cast him away as carrion or forbear for his knighthood's sake, and for the valour that every brave man should respect in another, when Golokopitenko rode up, shouting—

“There's trouble, ataman! The Poles are refreshed; new forces have joined them——”

Before he could finish Voutuzenko galloped up, crying—



“BATKA, BATKA! WHAT HAVE YE DONE?”

Taras Bulba

“There’s trouble, ataman; they have brought up more men——”

But before he had finished Pisarenko ran up, horseless.

“Where art thou, Batka? The Cossacks are asking for thee. Ataman Nevilitchki is slain, but the men stand firm. They will not die till they have seen thy face. They will have thee look upon them before death’s hour cometh.”

“To horse, Ostap!” cried Bulba, and hurried to rejoin his men, that they might see their ataman before they died.

But the Poles surrounded the forest before he and his companions could get clear of it, and pikemen and swordsmen were everywhere between the trees.

“Don’t give in, Ostap! Hold out!” cried Taras.

And unsheathing his sword, he struck out on all sides. Six Poles sprang out upon Ostap at a bad moment, for one lost

Taras Bulba

his head, the second turned and fled, the third got a spear in his ribs, the fourth lowered his head just in time to escape a bullet, which struck his horse. Maddened by the pain, the brute stood on his haunches, and rolling on the ground, crushed his rider under him.

“Well done, sonnie! Well done, Ostap!” cried Taras. “I’ll follow thee this minute.”

And the old man beat off his assailants, striking out to right and left of him, and looking at his son, to see that eight more men had closed round him.

“Ostap, Ostap, hold out, hold out!”

But Ostap is overcome. One man has flung a lasso round his neck—the rope tightens, Ostap is taken.

“Eh, Ostap! Ostap!” cried Taras, fighting his way towards his son, and cutting down the Poles like cabbages.

“Eh, Ostap! Ostap!” . . . But something heavy has hit old Taras.

Taras Bulba

Everything dances before his eyes—heads, spears, smoke, sparks that flew from the trees; all glints in his eyes. He drops like a felled oak, and a cloud has covered his eyes.

CHAPTER X.



“I’VE slept long,” said Taras, waking up as out of a long drunken sleep, and trying to recognize the objects around him. A fearful weakness

had taken hold of him, and the walls of the strange room danced before his eyes. But after some efforts he was able to recognize Captain Tookatch, who was sitting by him, anxiously listening to his

Taras Bulba

patient's breathing, and reflecting, "Yea, maybe thou wouldst have dropped asleep for ever," but he said nothing, and held up a warning finger for silence.

"Tell me where I am," asked Taras, making efforts to recall what had happened.

"Be quiet," said his comrade, sternly. "What more dost want to know? Canst not see thou'st all cut about? 'Tis two weeks now we've been racing about together, and thou'st had the fever all the time, and babbled nought but rubbish. 'Tis the first time thou hast slept quietly. Be still, if thou'lt not bring misfortune on thyself."

But Taras did not heed Tookatch, and went on trying to gather his thoughts and remember what had happened.

"Yea, methinks the Poles had surrounded and laid hold on me," he remarked. "Was there no way for me to fight through that pack?"

"Be quiet, thou devil's child, when thou'rt

Taras Bulba

told!" roared Tookatch, like an angry nurse whose patience her troublesome charge has worn out. "What booteth it to know how it came about? 'Tis enough to know that it did come about, and that there were those who did not desert thee. Yea, and let that be enough; we've got a good many nights to race through together yet; think not thou'rt priced as a simple Cossack. Nay! They've put two thousand ducats upon thy head."

"And Ostap!" shouted Taras, for he had been straining his memory, and suddenly remembered how Ostap had been caught and bound before his eyes, and that he must now be in the Poles' hands. The old head was filled with grief, he tore the bandages from his wounds, and cast them from him, trying to say something that turned into nonsense. Fever and delirium again came over him, and he broke into a storm of disconnected, meaningless words.

Taras Bulba

But his faithful comrade stood over him, scolding and abusing him with stern, reproachful words. At last he took his patient by the arms and legs, swathed him in bandages, wrapped him in an ox-hide, and fastening him to the saddle with ropes, set out on his homeward journey again, muttering, "Though dead, I'll get thee there! I'll take good care the Poles don't mock at thy Cossack birth, or cut thy flesh into bits and throw it into the river. If the eagle is to pick out thy eyes, let it be an eagle of our own steppes, and not of Polish ones, nor one that flieth on Polish soil. I'll get ye to the Ukraine, though thou be but a corpse."

So said the faithful comrade, as racing by day and by night, he brought his Bulba, all unconscious, to Sietch itself. There he began doctoring him with all manner of herbs and ointments procured from a wise Jewess, and the old man began to mend. Either the medicines or his iron constitution

Taras Bulba

got the upper hand of his injuries, and after six weeks' sufferings, he stood on his legs once more. His wounds healed, and nothing but a long, deep scar on the face showed that the old Cossack had been seriously wounded. But he had grown strangely sad and gloomy. Three deep wrinkles appeared on his forehead, and never left it. Now, when he looked around him, all in Sietch was new; all the old comrades were gone, and not one of those who had fought with him for Faith, and Right, and Brotherhood was there. Those who followed the commander in pursuit of the Tartars had perished long ago. All had laid down their heads, all were lost. Some had given their lives in honourable battle, others, bereft of bread and water, had perished amidst the Crimean salt marshes, whilst a few had fallen into shameful bondage. Even the commander himself had long since left the world, taking all his old comrades with him,

Taras Bulba

and the grass had grown high on what was once Cossack strength. All Taras Bulba knew was that there had been feasting—riotous, clamorous feasting; that every drop of wine was drunk, that the guests and serving-men had pillaged the precious flasks and goblets, whilst the host stood by sadly thinking 'twere better had there been no feast at all. All efforts to arouse and cheer Bulba were unsuccessful. In vain the grey-headed minstrels would come in twos and threes and sing of the old Cossack's valour. He looked at them sternly and coldly till a look of unfading bitterness settled on his face, and bending his head, he would mutter, "My son, my Ostap!"

The Cossacks of Sietch made a raid by sea. They went in two hundred "sea-gulls" down the Dnieper; Minor Asia saw their shaven beards and long tufts of hair. They spread fire and sword on the flowering coast, and the turbans saw their Mussulman

Taras Bulba

wearers scattered over bloody fields, or floating down the rivers. Many wide, tarbesmeared Cossack trousers were to be seen too, and many a brawny, knout-armed hand. The men of Sietch trod down the vineyards, eat up the grapes, turned the mosques into dunghills, and tied Persian shawls round their tunics and trousers. Long, long after, the Mussulman found short Cossack pipes as he ploughed.

But as the men of Sietch were sailing homewards, a ten-gun Turkish vessel overtook them and scattered their canoes like birds. One-third was left in the bottom of the Black Sea, but the survivors managed to reach the Dnieper in safety, and with twelve barrels full of sequins.

But all this no longer interested Taras Bulba. He would go to the steppes and meadows as if to shoot, but his load was never discharged, and his gun lay idle beside him, whilst he would sit down on the



“HIS GUN LAY IDLE BESIDE HIM.”

Taras Bulba

shore, full of grief. Long he sat there, his head bent, and the cry of, "Ostap, my Ostap!" ever on his lips.

The Black Sea glinted and shimmered before him; the seagull's cry arose from the distant reeds; his grey hairs turned to silver, and the tears rolled silently down his cheeks. But one day at last he arose, and said—

"No matter what happens, I will away and see how it fareth with him: if he be alive or in prison, or if the prison knoweth him no more. I will away, come what will."

And a week later, armed with his spear and sword, with flask and pannikin at his saddle-bow, he rode into the little town of Umana, straight up to a dirty, miserable cottage, where the small windows were opaque, the chimney stopped with rags, and the dilapidated roof covered with birds' nests. A heap of filth stood by the door, and a Jewess, in a cap trimmed with dirty

Taras Bulba

beads, popped her head out of one of the windows.

“Husband at home?” asked Bulba, getting down from his horse and making the bridle fast to a staple by the door.

“At home,” answered the Jewess, and she hastened out with a bucket of oats for the steed and a flagon of beer for the knight.

“Then where is thy Jew?” asked Bulba.

“In yonder room. He is praying,” answered the Jewess, with a curtsy, as Taras raised the beer to his lips.

“Stay here and look to my horse. I'll speak with him alone. I have business with him.”

The Jew was Jankel. He had already set up an inn in Umana, and managed to get most of the nobles around into his hands; he sucked up all the money that was to be had, and exerted his Jewish abilities to such advantage that not even a cottage within twenty-one versts around Umana was free

Taras Bulba

of him. Had he inhabited the neighbourhood another ten years he would surely have fleeced the Voevoda himself.

Taras entered the little room, where Jankel, shrouded in a dirty praying-mantle, was deep in his devotions; but turning round to spit on the ground for "Amen," as is the Jewish custom, his glance fell on the old Cossack standing behind him, and the two thousand ducats offered for his head flashed before his eyes. But he was ashamed of his own greed, and strove to conquer the everlasting lust of gold that ate into his Jewish soul like a canker.

"Listen, Jankel," said Taras, as the Jew carefully shut the door. "I saved thy life—the Cossacks would have drowned thee like a rat; now 'tis my turn, now thou must do me a service."

The Jew screwed up his face and asked, "What service? If it is service that can be done, why not do it?"

Taras Bulba

“Say nothing! Take me to Warsaw!”

“To Warsaw! What! to Warsaw?” cried Jankel, raising his brows and shrugging his shoulders in astonishment.

“Thou hast no need to say anything. Take me to Warsaw. Come what may I must see him again, and speak a word to him.”

“Speak a word to whom?”

“Him—Ostap, my son!”

“Have ye not heard, sir, that——”

“I know. I know everything. They’ve put two thousand ducats on my head. They know its worth, the dogs. I’ll give thee five thousand ducats! Here are two thousand at once.” Bulba pulled two thousand ducats from a leathern wallet. “Thou shalt have the rest when I get back.”

The Jew caught up a towel and covered the money with it.

“Oh, the beautiful money! oh, the good money!” he cried, picking up a ducat and

Taras Bulba

biting it. "Methinks the man you got them from, sir, did not live an hour after it; methinks he went straightway into the river, yea, and drowned there too, after such good ducats."

"I'd not have asked thee, maybe I'd have gone to Warsaw alone, but some of those accursed Poles might recognize me and take me prisoner. Besides, I'm not good at plotting, and you Jews are made for it. Ye'd take in the devil himself. Ye know all the tricks there are, and that's why I came to thee. Yea, and I'd do no good at all, alone in Warsaw. Harness thy horses at once and take me there!"

"And do you think, sir, it only means harnessing the mares and done with? Do you think, sir, that I can get you to Warsaw without hiding you?"

"Well, well, hide me as thou wilt—in an empty barrel, if thou wilt!"

"Eh! eh! And you think, sir, that you

Taras Bulba

can be hidden in a barrel? Don't you know, sir, that everybody will think there's brandy in the barrel?"

"Well, and let them think there is brandy in the barrel!"

"What! let them think it's brandy?" exclaimed Jankel, putting his thumbs in his arm-holes and sticking out his elbows.

"What art thou making all that ado about?" cried Bulba.

"And don't you know, sir," asked Jankel, "that God made brandy so that every man might taste it? They are all a lot of greedy guzzlers, those nobles; they are ready to run five versts after the barrel, and when they find brandy don't run out of it, they'll say, 'The Jew hath not brought an empty barrel, there must be somebody in it.' Then they'll catch hold of the Jew, they'll bind up the Jew, they'll take away all the Jew's money, they'll put the Jew in prison, because all that is evil is put on to the Jew, because every-

Taras Bulba

body mistakes the Jew for a dog, because they think he's not a man."

"Well, then, put me into thy cart with some fish."

"It can't be done, sir. My God, it can't be done! The people all over Poland are as hungry as hounds just now, and they'll steal all the fish and feel the gentleman under it."

"Well, then, take me in the devil himself, if thou wilt—only take me."

"Listen, sir, listen," said the Jew, waving his lanky arms. "This is what we'll do. They are building a lot of fortresses and castles now; French engineers have come, and they are bringing a lot of bricks and stones from everywhere. So do you, sir, be down in the bottom of the cart, and I'll put bricks on the top; you look strong and hearty, and you'll not harm from it, though it'll be somewhat heavy. I'll make a little hole in the bottom of the cart to feed you by."

Taras Bulba

“Do what thou wilt, only take me,” was all Taras said.

An hour after, a cart drawn by two thin mares left the town. One of the mares bore Jankel, his long Jewish coat hanging down from the great, lean brute's side.

CHAPTER XI.

IN those days there were no such things as custom-houses or custom-house officers—the two terrors of modern travellers; everybody could bring what they wanted into the country, and if any one did examine the goods, it was but for his own personal satisfaction, especially if a waggon contained anything that pleased the eye without being too heavy for the hand. But bricks tempted nobody, and the travellers reached the gates of Warsaw without mishap or adventure. From his close prison Bulba could hear nothing but the muffled noise and shouts of the drivers, as Jankel twisted and turned his dusty steeds in and out of various thoroughfares and finally drove into a narrow, dingy street known by the names

Taras Bulba

of "Dirty" and "Jewish," the latter by reason of its affording shelter to nearly all the Israelites of Warsaw. This street was



“THE TRAVELLERS REACHED THE GATES OF WARSAW
WITHOUT MISHAP OR ADVENTURE.”

remarkably like a narrow back-yard. The sun scarcely ever shone into it, the wooden houses were quite black, and the sticks and

Taras Bulba

props that hung from the small, dirty windows only added to the gloom. Here and there a red-brick wall did its best to enliven the aspect, but even they had turned almost black and long ceased to be brightened by an occasional sunbeam. Everything here was hardness; broken chimneys, rags, litter of various kinds, all that was wretched and unlovely seemed to have collected in this one street and revelled in the ugliness thereof. Those who passed through it could scarcely keep clear of the poles and props which stretched across from house to house, and from which dangled Jewish stockings, coats, and smoked geese. Here and there a comely Jewess, with a dirty bead necklace, peeped out of one of the windows; a group of dirty, tattered, curly-headed little Jews screamed and played in the filthy kennel. A red-haired Jew, with a face freckled like a plover's egg, was leaning out of a window as Jankel drove into the street, and the two lost

Taras Bulba

no time in opening a conversation in the incomprehensible language of their race. Then another Jew came up and joined his voice to theirs, and when Bulba finally crawled out from under the bricks, all three were talking excitedly and at once.

Jankel turned to the Cossack, saying that all would be done; that Ostap was in the town jail, and that though it was not an easy thing to conciliate the guards, there was every hope that Bulba would see his son. Then they all went into one of the houses, where the Jews began their wonderful jargon again. As Taras watched them, some feeling seemed to move him, and a faint flicker of hope, the hope that only a man in the last stages of despair can feel, flashed over his thick, stern face. His old heart began to beat as though he were young once more, and it was with something like enthusiasm that he said—

“Hark ye, ye Jews! Ye can do every-

Taras Bulba

thing, even to digging up the sea-bottom, if ye only will, and the proverb hath long said that a Jew can cheat himself. Get my Ostap out of prison, get him out of these devils' hands: I have already promised this rogue twelve thousand ducats, I'll add another twelve thousand thereto. All that I have, rich goblets and buried treasures, my farm and my last rag I'll give ye, and make a compact to share all I get in battle for the rest of my life, if ye'll only do that."

"Oh, it can't be done, dear gentleman, it can't be done!" gasped Jankel. "No, it can't be done," repeated the freckled Jew, with a sigh.

The three Jews looked at each other.

"And if we were to try," said the third, looking timidly at the other two, "maybe God would grant it."

Here all three began to talk German; but though Taras tried his hardest, he could

Taras Bulba

make out nothing but "Mardohai, Mardohai," which they repeated over and over again.

"Listen, sir," said Jankel at last. "We must consult a man whose equal hath never yet been. Ay, ay! he's a very Solomon of wisdom, and when he can't do something nobody can. Stay here, sir; here is the key, and do you let nobody in."

The Jews went out. Taras locked the door and looked out of the window on to the squalid street, in the middle of which stood the three Jews, arguing loudly. They were soon joined by a fourth and fifth, and again Taras heard the word "Mardohai, Mardohai," and they all looked constantly at one end of the street, until at last a Jewish slipper and the folds of a long Jewish coat appeared from a distant house. "Ah, Mardohai! Mardohai!" screamed the Jews all together, as the owner of the coat and slippers, a gaunt man, scarcely shorter than Jankel, with a wrinkled face and

Taras Bulba

abnormally large upper lip, joined them. Then there were more screams and more glances at the window, from which Taras concluded that he was the subject of their conversation. Mardohai swung his arms, listened to and interrupted the conversation, spat freely, and raising the skirt of his coat and putting his hands into his trouser-pockets, rattled something about in them and exposed the ends of a very dirty, ugly waistcoat. They all talked, or rather screamed so loud at last, that another Jew, who was on guard at the corner of the street, signed to them to be quiet, and Taras began to fear for his safety. Remembering, however, that Jews can never talk anywhere but in the street, and that the Demon himself could not understand their jargon, his mind was at ease again. Soon after all the Jews entered the room. Mardohai went up to Bulba, touched him on the shoulder, and said—

Taras Bulba

“When we and God will do somewhat, then all will be well, as it must.”

As Taras looked at this Solomon, whose like never yet was upon the earth, he felt a faint hope, and as a matter of fact his appearance inspired a certain amount of confidence. His upper lip was simply horrible by reason of its abnormal thickness, which must have been due to some unnatural cause. This Solomon's beard consisted of fifteen hairs, and these were all on the left side, whilst his face was so covered with scars and the other marks of ill-treatment his wisdom had occasioned, that he had long since lost all count of them and looked upon them as natural blemishes.

Mardohai went out with his two companions who were lost in admiration of his wisdom, and Bulba was left alone once more. He was in a state of mind that he had never known before; he felt anxious for the first time in his life—no longer like a stout, un-



““WHEN WE AND GOD WILL DO SOMEWHAT, THEN ALL WILL
BE WELL, AS IT MUST.””

Taras Bulba

bending oak, but faint-hearted and weak. He trembled at every footfall and at the glimpse of every Jewish figure that flitted across the narrow street. His suspense lasted until the evening, and he spent the day by the window, without either eating or drinking. At last, when it was growing late, Mardohai and Jankel came back. Bulba's heart sank as soon as he saw them.

“What—is it well?” he asked, with the impatience of a wild horse; but before the Jews answered he noticed that Mardohai had lost his last lock of hair, which had escaped from under his cap in a greasy ringlet earlier in the day. The Solomon evidently wanted to say something, but he spoke such jargon that Taras could not understand a word, and even Jankel was at a loss to make out the fellow's meaning.

“Oh dear, kind gentleman,” the latter exclaimed, “it can't be done, it really can't be done! My God, it can't! They are

Taras Bulba

such an ugly people that the only thing is to spit on their heads. So saith Mardohai, and Mardohai hath done what no other man could do ; but God hath not wished that it should be so. Three thousand soldiers are on guard, and they are all to be put to death to-morrow.”

Taras looked at the Jew, but quietly now and without the slightest impatience. The Jew went on—

“And if you would like to see him, sir, you must be there to-morrow before sunrise. The guard hath nothing against it, and one sergeant hath promised. But may happiness forsake them all—by God, may happiness forsake them all! they are a greedy and covetous people, even such as we have not amongst us. Fifty ducats was I forced to give each sentry, and as to the sergeant——”

“Well! thou shalt take me to him,” broke in Taras firmly, for his heart was

Taras Bulba

stout once more. He agreed to Jankel's proposal to disguise himself as a foreign count, just arrived from Germany. The wily Jew had procured the necessary clothes in the town. Night had long since fallen; the master of the house, who turned out to be none other than the freckled Jew, dragged out a thick mattress covered with some sort of skin and put it on to a settle for Taras. Another mattress accommodated Jankel on the floor. The freckled Jew drank something out of a cup, threw off his coat, and dressed in his slippers and stockings, he and his wife retired into a kind of cupboard. Two little Jewish children lay like house-dogs on the floor by the cupboard. Only Taras did not sleep; he sat up all night long, drumming his fingers on the table and puffing at his short pipe, the smoke from which must have tickled Jankel's nose and throat, for he coughed and sneezed without ceasing. The first rays of dawn had scarcely

Taras Bulba

lightened up the sky when Taras gave him a kick, crying—

“Get up, Jew, and give me thy count’s dress.”

It did not take him long to put it on and blacken his head and moustachios. When he had done this and put on the little black cap, his eldest comrade would not have recognized him. His cheeks were full of healthy colour, his scars gave him a distinguished look, and nobody would have supposed him to be more than thirty-five years old.

The town was still asleep when they left the Jewish street, and they did not meet as much as a hawker all the way to a large building that looked more like a heron than anything else. It was low, broad, and dark, but from one end of it a high, narrow tower craned up into the air like a stork’s neck. It served many purposes, for not only were the law courts and prisons within its walls,

Taras Bulba

but a large garrison was stationed there as well.

Taras and Jankel entered the broad gateway and turned into a large hall or covered courtyard where about a thousand men were sleeping. Straight in front of them they saw a low door guarded by two sentries, who were so intent on a game (in which one beat the other's palm with two fingers) that they did not raise their heads until Jankel said—

“It's us, gentlemen, it's only us.”

“Go through,” one of them answered, opening the door with one hand and holding out the other for his companion to rap.

Following the guard's directions, they found themselves in a dark, narrow passage, which led them into a second hall, lighted by small windows set high up in the walls.

“Who goes there?” asked a voice, and Taras saw the watch, well-ordered and fully-armed. “We have orders not to let anybody pass,” the voice continued.

Taras Bulba

“But it’s us,” protested Jankel; “my God, it’s only us, illustrious gentlemen!”

Nobody heeded him, but luckily a stout man, who seemed to be their sergeant, happened to swagger up at this moment. Jankel appealed to him, saying—

“’Tis me, sir, ’tis me—ye know us already; and this gentleman, the count, will thank you once more.”

“Let them pass, ye hundred devils of a satanic mother! and let nobody else pass. Yea, and put up your swords, ye snarling curs, instead of clanking them like——”

But the pair hurried on without waiting to hear the rest of the sentence, Jankel meeting everybody with the words—“’Tis us, ’tis me, ’tis friends,” until they reached the end of a long passage where a man was standing by a small door, when he asked—

“Can we go on?”

“Ye can,” the man answered, “but I

Taras Bulba

doubt if ye'll get into the prison. Jan is no longer there, another hath taken his place."

"Oi, oi," groaned the Jew; "that's very bad, my good sir."

"Go on!" commanded Taras, sternly, and they came upon another sentry standing by a heavy-nailed door. He had magnificent moustachios, which were divided into three parts. One flowed backwards, the second forwards, and the third downwards—giving him the appearance of a tom-cat. The Jew twisted his face and sidled up to this personage, saying—

"Your highness! Most illustrious sir."

"Talkest thou to me, thou fool?" asked the sentry.

"To you, most illustrious gentleman," answered Jankel.

"H'm. I'm a heyduke,"¹ remarked the owner of the moustachios, his face somewhat softening.

¹ Heyduke=a man-in-waiting (in Old Poland).

Taras Bulba

“By God, I thought ’twas the Governor himself!” exclaimed Jankel, twisting his face and holding up his hands. “Oi, oi, what a commanding appearance! Why, he only needeth an inch to make him a colonel. Why, if we put you on a horse, sir, a horse as swift as a fly, sir, you could command a regiment.”

The heyduke stroked his lower moustachio, and his face beamed. The Jew went on—

“Eh, what a warlike people, my God, what an excellent people! The braids and the galoons, how they glitter and shine on them, just like the very sun! And as to the ladies, when they do but see a soldier, oi, oi!”

And Jankel twisted and twirled in admiration, whilst the heyduke played with his upper moustachio, and a noise, more like the neigh of a horse than anything else, proceeded from between his teeth.

Taras Bulba

“I must ask you to do me a service, sir,” Jankel went on. “Here is a prince, who hath come from foreign countries and would look at the Cossacks. He hath never seen what manner of men are they.”

Foreign barons and counts, by no means rare in Poland, were always anxious to see this semi-Asiatic corner of Europe (they looked upon Muscovy and the Ukraine as quite Asiatic). So the heyduke bowed low, and thinking this an excellent opportunity for giving the distinguished foreigner a few of his private opinions, remarked—

“I know not, illustrious sir, why you should want to look at these Cossacks. They are dogs, not people, and their religion is such that no man respecteth it.”

“Thou liest, devil’s son!” roared Bulba, forgetting his part. “Thou’rt a dog thyself. No man respecteth our religion? ’Tis thy heretical religion no man respecteth.”

Taras Bulba

“Aho, aho!” retorted the heyduke. “Now I know thee, my friend! Thou’rt one of these I’ve got here! Wait! Ye’ll have the guard upon ye.”

Taras saw his blunder, but was too angry and proud to try to repair it. Jankel hastened to the rescue, however, crying—

“Most illustrious gentleman, how can the count be a Cossack? From where would a Cossack get such rich clothes and such a handsome mien?”

“Say what ye will, I’ll call the guard,” and the heyduke opened his large mouth to shout.

“Your kingly majesty! Your royal majesty, be quiet; for God’s sake, be quiet!” implored Jankel. “Be but quiet and we’ll pay you as nobody yet was paid: we’ll give you two gold ducats!”

“Ha! two gold ducats! What are two gold ducats to me, forsooth? Why, I pay



“‘MOST ILLUSTRIOUS GENTLEMAN, HOW CAN THE COUNT
BE A COSSACK?’”

Taras Bulba

the barber two gold ducats for shaving half my chin! Give me a hundred ducats, thou Jew"—here the heyduke twisted his upper moustachio—"or I'll shout for the guard at once."

Jankel turned pale.

"But why so much, why so much?" he groaned, pulling out a leather bag.

But he was glad it contained no more than the sum demanded, and that the heyduke could only count up to a hundred.

"Let's go, sir, let's go, sir; let's get away quickly. You see what scurvy people they are," he pleaded, seeing the heyduke weigh the money in his hand as if regretting he had not asked for more. But Bulba was not to be so easily persuaded.

"How now, thou devil's heyduke," he protested; "thou hast the ducats and wilt not so much as show us the way? Thou hast taken our money and hast no right to refuse us now!"

Taras Bulba

“Get off! Get off with ye to the devil! If no, I’ll shout; take up your feet quicker, I tell ye!”

“Let us go, sir; my God, let us go! They are but to be shot upon. My God, let us be going!” pleaded the terrified Jew.

Slowly and with bent head, Bulba turned away from the door. Jankel followed him, full of reproaches, for the loss of so many ducats embittered his Jewish soul.

“And what was the good of the bribe? and what did he argue with us? ’Tis a people that must be for ever quarrelling! My word! what God sends us. One hundred ducats for sending us away! And our brother Mardohai hath had his hair pulled out and his face battered till nobody can look upon it, and no man giveth him a hundred ducats,” he moaned.

The failure made a deeper impression upon Bulba, as his flashing eyes showed, but he only said—

Taras Bulba

“Come, let us into the square! I will see them torture him!”

“O sir, what’s the good of going? We can’t help him any way now,” protested Jankel.

“We are going!” said Bulba, stubbornly, and Jankel followed, sighing.

They had no difficulty in finding the square where the executions were to take place, for people were thronging there from all parts of the town. Such ceremonies were amongst the best pageants in those dark ages, when not only the lower, but the upper classes delighted in them. Many old men, many women and girls were there, some of them the mildest of creatures, who would tremble all night at the thought of those blood-stained corpses, and scream at the sight of a drunken hussar. But they never failed to avail themselves of such an occasion as the present one, though many of them covered their faces and cried, “Oh,

Taras Bulba

what torture! Oh, what brutality!" when they grew tired of watching the proceedings. Others, however, stood there with widely opened eyes and outstretched hands, and would have liked to jump over the heads of those in front of them, to get a nearer view.

A butcher stretched his narrow forehead and fat face above the crowd and watched it with all the air of a connoisseur, muttering a few words to the man next to him, whom he had come with because they spent the saints' days in the same pothouse. Some, too, were so excited that the perspiration ran down their faces; but most of the crowd were such as watch all that passes in the world with stolid indifference. Right in front, by the scaffold, stood a young noble—or rather a young man who tried to look like one, having put on the contents of his wardrobe, which consisted of an old uniform, a foreign shirt, a pair of shoes, and a chain with a

Taras Bulba

ducat hanging therefrom. He stood by his mistress, and kept perpetual guard over her silken kerchief, lest some one might steal it. He explained everything to her, without omitting the smallest details.

“Here, sweetheart,” he cried, “are all the people who have come to see the rebels executed. There, dost see that man, my love, with the axe and other instruments? That is the executioner, and he is going to put them to death. And when he begins to break them upon the wheel and other tortures the rebels will still be alive; but when he chops off their heads they’ll be dead, my love. And at first he will scream and writhe, but as soon as his head is chopped off he won’t be able to scream any more, nor eat, nor even drink, because he’ll have no head, my love.”

And “my love” listened to all this with mingled fear and curiosity.

The roofs of the houses were covered with

Taras Bulba

people, and many a comely face peeped out of the dormer windows. The aristocracy sat on and under the balconies, and dazzling, smiling dames laid their pretty hands on the balustrades, whilst illustrious gentlemen, —fat enough too, some of them—looked gravely on. Peasants, dressed in gaudy clothes and with their sleeves thrown back, handed them refreshments, whilst a black-eyed lassie flung fruit and cakes amongst a crowd of hungry knights, who held up their caps to catch the prizes. One tall noble, whose head towered above all the others, and who was dressed in a red tunic trimmed with tarnished gold braid, was the first to succeed, thanks to his long arms. He kissed the prize, held it to his heart, put it into his mouth and ate it. A falcon in a gilded cage was also a spectator; he, too, looked earnestly down at the crowd. But the people's patience was rewarded at last by the cry of—"They are bringing the Cos-

Taras Bulba

sacks! they are bringing the Cossacks!" and the Cossacks, with bare heads and long forelocks, entered the square. They came neither timidly nor surlily, but with a quiet haughtiness. Their faces were unshaven, and their clothes of costly cloth hung about them in rags. They did not salute or even look at the crowd. First of all walked Ostap. What were old Taras Bulba's feelings when he saw his son? What was in his heart as he gazed at him from the crowd, careful not to lose one gesture?

When they reached the place of torture, Ostap stood still. He was to drink the bitter cup before any of them. Looking at his fellow-prisoners, he stretched out his hand and said loudly—

"God grant that the impious heretics, as many as stand here, may not hear a sound when Christians are tortured, that not one of us may utter a single word."

Taras Bulba

With that he stepped on to the scaffold.

“Well said, sonnie, well said!” muttered Bulba quietly, and bent his grey head.

The executioners tore off Ostap's outer rags, fastened his hands and legs, and put them into grooves made for the purpose; then—— But we will not pain the reader with a description of those hellish tortures. They

were the outcome of a hard age, when men's minds, fed on battle and bloodshed, were yet strangers to compassion. A humane minority protested against these atrocities, but uselessly. In vain the king and his more enlightened courtiers pointed out that these brutalities only drove the Cossacks to sterner revenge; their arguments were powerless against the will of the proud provincial magnates, who turned the Diet into a mockery of government by their childish conceit, frivolity, and short-sightedness.

Ostap bore the tortures like a giant; not so much as a groan escaped him, even when

Taras Bulba

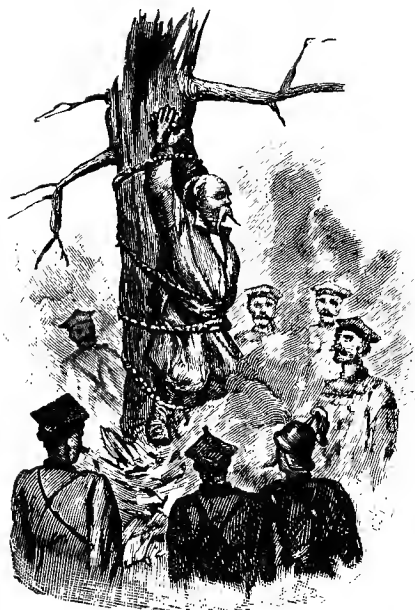
they broke his hands and feet, and the most distant spectators in that silent crowd heard the sickening crack of the joints, and the maidens turned their eyes away. Not a sound escaped his lips, nor did a muscle of his face twitch. Here Taras, who had been standing with bent head, drew himself up. "Well done, sonnie, well done!" he whispered approvingly. But when they inflicted the last and deadliest tortures upon him Ostap's strength began to waver, and he glanced about him. God! only strange, unknown faces! If he could but know that even one friend witnessed his death! He did not want to hear the sobs of his weak mother or the mad shrieks of a wife, beating her breast and tearing her hair. What he longed for now was some hard man, whose calm words would enlighten and refresh him in death's black hour; and his strength failed him, and he cried out in the weakness of his soul—

Taras Bulba

"Batka! where art thou? Dost hear all this?"

"Ay, I hear it!" rang through the silent crowd, and the thousands gathered there shouted as one man. The mounted guards searched the throng. Jankel, white as death, looked for Taras; but he had vanished.

CHAPTER XII.



BUT Taras Bulba's traces were not lost, for an army of 120,000 Cossacks crossed the borders of the Ukraine. This time it was not a handful of men eager for plunder or in

Taras Bulba

pursuit of the Tartar. The whole nation had lost patience, and the whole nation arose as one man to avenge their injuries and disregarded liberties, the Faith of their forefathers and the many tyrannies they had suffered at the hands of foreign magnates and Jews; to avenge, in short, the hundred wrongs which had aroused their bitter hatred.

Ocranitsa, a young Cossack, but strong of heart, was chosen hetman of the unconquerable Cossack forces. Old Gunia, his comrade and counsellor, was ever at his side. Eight colonels led the army; two captains and two standard-bearers rode behind the hetman. The first ensign carried the largest standard, but there were many smaller ones. Many other officers they were too, such as baggage-masters, scriveners, and adjutants, who marched before the horse and foot. Almost all were knight-errants, who had come freely and as volunteers. They had ridden

Taras Bulba

from Chigirin and Pereslav, from Baturin and Gluchov, from the lower reaches of the Dnieper, and from all the isles and streams, till the horses and baggage-train stretched in an endless line along the steppe.

And among all these Cossacks, among all these eight picked regiments, was one better than the rest, for Taras Bulba commanded it. Everything marked him above his comrades: his years and experience, the judgment with which he led his men, and more than all, his surpassing hatred of the enemy. His stern, brutal severity astonished even the Cossacks, for the grey head thought but of fire and the gallows, and his counsel was ever the same—"extermination."

It were bootless to tell of all the battles which marked the campaign, for they are written on history's pages. It is well known that the land of Rus had an army founded upon religion, than which no foundation is more powerful. Hard and stern it is as

Taras Bulba

the rock in the midst of a strong ocean. It rears its unbreakable walls from the sea's deep bed and gazes long and sternly at the waves which break over it. Woe betide the ship that strikes it, for her riggings shall float in broken pieces and her sides be ground to powder, whilst her drowning crew's despairing cry fills the air. And the historians tell us how the Polish garrison fled from the empty towns; how the Jewish usurers were hanged without mercy; how weak the hetman, Nicholas Potocki, was, for all his glittering army; how, wearied and chivied by the Cossacks, he lost the best part of his men in a small stream; how he was brought to bay in the little town of Polonie; how, pushed to the last extreme, the Polish hetman swore that the King and Diet would make the Cossacks full amendment and give them back all their old rights and privileges. But the Cossacks knew the worth of a Polish oath too well

Taras Bulba

to surrender on such terms; and there would have been an end to Potocki, the admiration of proud dames and the envy of gallant cavaliers, there would have been an end to his flaunting at the Diet and his feasting of the Senators, had it not been for the Russian priests of the town, who saved his life. When all the popes, led by the crucifix and their bishop, clad in glittering vestments and bearing the images, walked to the field, the Cossacks took off their caps and bowed their heads. Nobody, not even the king, would have influenced them at such a moment; but they dared not rebel against their own Christian Church. They listened to the popes, and the Cossack hetman and his colonels agreed to set Potocki free on his making a solemn promise that the Orthodox Church should be unmolested, old feuds forgotten, and Cossack chivalry freed from insult. But one of the colonels refused to agree to such terms. It was

Taras Bulba

Taras Bulba, who, pulling out a tuft of his hair, shouted—

“Believe not such old wives’ fables! Believe not the Poles; they will betray ye!”

When the scrivener had written down the terms of the treaty and sealed it, Bulba drew his sword of fine Turkish steel, and breaking it in two like a reed, flung each half in opposite directions, and cried—

“Farewell! When those two pieces of steel join together and make one blade, then shall we meet again on earth! Remember my parting words!” Here his voice swelled. “Ye will remember me in the hour of your death. Ye think ye have bought peace and quietness! Ye think ye will be masters! Ye think ye will indeed see a kingdom! They’ll turn your head into leather, hetman; ay, and they’ll chop it off too, and show it at every fair and market for many a day to come! And ye

Taras Bulba

too, gentlemen! think not to keep your heads on your shoulders! Ye'll perish in dreary prisons, ye'll sicken between stone walls—unless, forsooth, they cook ye alive like sheep. And ye, my lads"—here he turned to his own men—"which of ye will die his own death?—not wallowing in stoves or swilling in sheds and pothouses like carrion, but die the death of honest Cossacks—all on one couch, like a bridegroom with his bride? Or perchance ye will home again, to turn heretics, yea, to carry the Polish priest on your backs!"

"We'll follow you, colonel; we'll follow you!" answered all his men, and not a few from the other regiments.

"If so, then after me!" cried Taras, ramming his cap on to his brows and glaring at those who stayed behind. He mounted his horse, shouting, "There's not one amongst them that dares to say a

Taras Bulba

word. Ah well! let's away and pay the Roman Catholics a visit!"

With this he whipped his horses, and a baggage-train of a hundred waggons followed him, as well as many Cossacks, both horse and foot. There was anger in his eyes as he turned back to look at those who stayed behind, but nobody dared to stop him. He and his regiment left in sight of the whole army, and long he turned round with threats. As to the hetman and colonels, they stood sadly, as though a presentiment of evil oppressed them. And Taras Bulba's words were no empty ones. All turned out as he had told them. It was not long before the hetman's head, together with those of his chief officers, were stuck up on poles. And Taras? Taras took his regiment all through Poland, burned eighteen towns, forty churches, and pushed on as far as Crakow. He killed all the nobles and looted all the castles that came to his

Taras Bulba

hand. His Cossacks ruthlessly poured out the old wine and honey which had been so carefully stored, tore up the rich dresses and destroyed the costly ornaments; and all Taras repeated was, "Spare nothing, lads, spare nothing!" And right well they obeyed their colonel. Tall youths and fair maidens they spared not; even the altar did not save them, for Taras burned them and the altars together. Snow-white hands were raised in supplication above the flames, and screams that would have moved the grey earth itself to pity, and caused the grass on the steppes to droop, failed to move the stern Cossacks as, picking the young men out of the streets on their spear-points, they cast them into the flames. And all Taras said was, "There's a prayer for Ostap's soul, ye dogs!" He raised such prayers in every hamlet, until the Poles saw that this raid of his was no mean one. Then Potocki, the same hetman the other

Taras Bulba

Cossacks surrendered to, was ordered to take five regiments and catch Taras Bulba.

Six days the Cossacks evaded their pursuers, till the horses could scarcely stand and all the men were wearied with the marching. This time Potocki proved himself worthy of his errand, for he pursued the Cossacks without ceasing, and finally came up to them on the banks of the Dniester, where Bulba had taken up his quarters in a ruined fortress that raised its ragged ramparts and crumbling walls above the river's bank. Here it was that Potocki, the king's hetman, surrounded Bulba from the inland. Four days the Cossacks withstood the siege, repulsing the Poles with bricks and stones ; but their strength and provisions gave out at last, and Taras Bulba determined to fight his way through the besiegers' ranks. And they were almost through them, and no doubt their swift, faithful horses would have accomplished their freedom had not Taras

Taras Bulba

reined up in the thick of the struggle and shouted—

“Wait! my pipe hath dropped. I would not that it fell into the enemy’s hands.”

The old ataman dismounted and began to search the grass for the pipe that had been his solace by land and sea, at home and abroad. Just then a company of soldiers rode up and caught him by his strong shoulders. He tried to shake them off, but the heydukes did not roll on to the ground as they had always done on such occasions.

“Eh! old age! old age!” cried the stout old Cossack, and burst into tears. But old age was not to blame; he was outnumbered by the thirty men who closed round him.

“Now that we’ve caught our bird,” cried the Poles, “we must make up our minds how to give the dog his due.”

They determined, with their hetman’s leave, to roast him alive. A bare trunk, whose branches had been struck off by light-

Taras Bulba

ning, stood just at hand. They chained him to this, and nailed his hands to the wood, taking good care to fasten him high up, so that all the Cossacks might see. Then they brought faggots, and piled them under him. But Taras did not think of the fire, or even glance at the faggots they had gathered to burn him with, for he was earnestly watching his men, who were firing steadily and were as clear to him, perched high as he was, as if they had been in the palm of his hand.

“On to the hill, behind the forest! On to the hill—quickly, quickly! They can't follow ye there,” he shouted, but the wind refused to carry his words. “They're lost, they're lost! and all for a trifle!” he cried, in despair, glancing down at the shining Dniester. His eyes brightened at once, for he saw four sterns peeping out of the coppice, and gathering up all his strength, shouted as loud as he could—

“To the river, lads! to the river! The



“‘EH! OLD AGE! OLD AGE!’ CRIED THE STOUT OLD COSSACK.”

Taras Bulba

path on the left, over the hill. There are canoes there! Take them all, or they'll follow ye!"

This time the breeze blew in the right direction, and the Cossacks heard every word. Bulba's advice brought the butt-end of a gun on his head with a force that made everything dance before his eyes, but the Cossacks rushed up the hill, the Poles after them. Then the latter saw how the path twisted and turned in all directions.

"Ah, comrades, let them be," they cried, all pulling up at once. There was the swing of a knout, a hiss, and the Tartar horses sprang like kites into the air, spanned the chasm and plunged into the water. Only two failed to reach the river; they were dashed against the crags, and perished, horses and men, without a cry. Now Cossack and horse have swam the river, and the Cossacks are untying the boats; whilst the Poles gaze down from the precipice and

Taras Bulba

marvel at the leap, uncertain whether to follow the foe or not. One young, hot-blooded officer, the brother of the girl who had bewitched poor Andrew, dashed after them, but horse and rider struck against a rock, and turning in mid-air, fell into the chasm, where the boy's body broke upon the stones, and his brains and blood sprinkled the shrubs that grew on the rough surface.

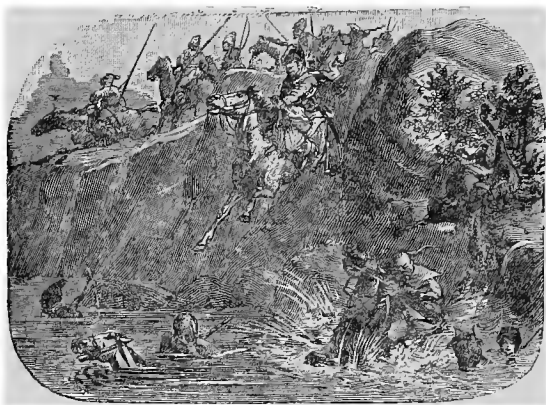
When Taras had recovered from the blow, he looked at the Dniester to see that the Cossacks had gained the boats and were rowing with all their might. Bullets whizzed down from above, but fell short of the mark. The old ataman's eyes flashed.

“Farewell, comrades!” he called to them. “Think of me and come again next spring; yea, make merry here! What have they gained, these devilish Poles? Think ye there is aught in the world can frighten a Cossack? Wait! and the day will come for ye to know what Russian faith is. Even

Taras Bulba

now the nations far and wide feel it! The land of Rus will raise up a Tzar, and no force on earth shall equal his!"

Now the flames have licked up the faggots and grasped Taras Bulba's feet, and now



they have caught the tree, but what force or flame can overcome a Russian's strength?

The Dniester is no small river, many a creek and bulrush has she, and many a hole and sandbank. She glitters like a mirror and reflects the wild-swan's whiteness. The

Taras Bulba

proud clangula skims over her surface, and many a snipe and woodcock delights in her reeds and banks. The Cossacks sped on in their swift canoes, steering clear of sandbanks and startling the birds, that rose in frightened flocks. And they talked of their ataman.

THE END.

THE WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING CO., LIMITED, FELLING-ON-TYNE.

